

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: TRANSCENDENCE OF TIME AND SPACE—THE
LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE
INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE
UNITED STATES

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This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of seven Chinese international graduate students in the United States. The students in this study range in age from the twenties to thirties and are pursuing advanced degrees in various disciplines including Education, American Studies, Economics, and the STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The phenomenological question is: What are the lived experiences of Chinese international graduate students in the United States?

This research is conducted in the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology drawing on the work of philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Dilthey, Merleau-Ponty, and Casey as foundational “grounding” for the study. Each of these philosophers brings key foundations to help illuminate the phenomenon, through such existentials as lived body, space, time and relation. Van Man provides the methodology to guide the study.

Through individual conversations with each participant, the themes generated revolve around orienting to a new environment, both academically and socially; finding familiarity in the midst of unfamiliarity, while living in between two languages and two

cultural worlds, both literally and metaphorically. Their journey to the U.S. is a journey with possible return to their home country; however, the return to their past and familiar practices is transformed and different. Their self-doubt and identity navigation are all revealed in this dissertation, such as their eagerness to “fit in” the U.S. environment while still making an effort to maintain their “Chineseness.” They also desire to establish friendships with Americans, contribute to their study fields, and experience the joy of freedom to achieve their “American Dreams.”

This study concludes with pedagogical recommendations that can help international students become more self-oriented and find fulfillment in their studies. The importance of listening and genuine care surfaced. In addition, it takes more a collaborative effort amongst different academic and support units to create a home community where international students can find places to belong.

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CHINESE INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother,

Zhuanzhuan Pan,

the strongest person that I have met,

the backbone of my life,

the one who always believes in me even during the dark times that I questioned myself,

the one who pushed me to go the extra mile

...

a woman who only finished elementary school

but a strong advocate for education

a woman with the biggest heart in the world

a woman who genuinely cares for others more than herself

a woman who loves,

a woman who falls but gets right back onto her feet

a woman who is shy but willing to challenge herself

to think and act outside of the box,

out of her comfort zone

...

To my mother, my haven, my rock star

Without her, this doctorate would not have been possible

With her, I believe that all things are possible

Because of her, I dare to think big, dream big, and act big

Because of her, I learned to care and love

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CHAPTER ONE: TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON—LONGING FOR HOME

Beginning of Newness and Difference

I came to the U.S. several years ago to pursue a post-graduate degree in Education. Walking among groups of people, I did not feel any different, especially on a diverse campus at the University of Maryland, and especially in the capital region where the culture of melting pot is greatly manifested. Yet, I do realize that difference exists in daily life, which goes beyond speech and language. As I recall and reflect on my own encounters with this newness and vast difference, I often think about other Chinese international students, wondering whether they are confronted with similar situations and how they handle them. Consider the following scenes played out in daily interactions.

Scene One

“What are you doing Yali?” asked my friend Eddie.

“Eating pizza.” I said.

“I can see that, but you are pulling the topping part away!”

“Oh, I don’t like cheese, and the cheese concentrates the most at the topping part.” I responded.

“But you are pulling the best part away!” He continued, as if he really could not tolerate me anymore.

“It is OK, the best part for me is the crust.” I followed his comment.

“You are weird, Yali.” He responded with a strange smile on his face that cannot be disguised.

I wonder what is wrong with me. Pizza per se is never a meal for me for some reason, perhaps too quick to be a meal, perhaps too much cheese on it, since I did not grow up in a cheese culture. I find it interesting that people put extra cheese on top of the already-cheesy pizza. It is also very hard for me to understand the fact that many friends, especially Americans, get so excited hearing pizza will be served on some occasions. “We are having pizza for dinner tonight!” “Yeah!” “Pizza will be served at the proseminar!” “Yeah!” “Free pizza in the Stamp Student Union today!” “Hooray!”...

Pizza becomes an incentive to attract and motivate people. However, somehow I have no interest at all. I would rather take my time, sit down together with my family, and have my rice, meat and vegetables either separated or mixed together as a dish, rather than as a topping. I miss my mother's food, the healthy food that we eat at home. I do not like the fast food culture here, which perhaps is why I do not have any desire to try other fast food besides pizza. A friend told me that I should at least try those things, and he said, "Otherwise it is going to short change your American experience." I wonder whether he is right, and whether I indeed need to do as he suggested. Am I really and fully experiencing America? Besides the foods we love, in what ways do our food choices keep us "culturally at home" in the midst of jolting differences? Do international students fear losing this inner at-home-ness by outer pressures of difference? Is there a cultural allegiance at work here?

Scene Two

"Oh, your salad looks so yummy, where did you get it?" asked Jacob.

"In the food court." I answered.

"What kind of salad is that?"

"Newport. I like it because it is the only cheese-free salad."

"You don't like cheese, OMG, you are so weird, Yali!" His face seemed so puzzled, confused, and despising.

"Let me tell you something Jacob, people who are different from you does not mean people are weird, you understand?" I don't know where I gained the courage to tell him off in front of many other people in the conference room.

Again, the cheese drama. I started wondering why people would call me weird only because I do not like cheese. Is this only a comment on cheese, or is it a judgment of me? Am I indeed "weird" as they call me? What should I do about it? Should I fight back like I did to Jacob, or keep silent, ignore it? What really is at play here? What is being resisted more: the food or "fitting in"? How do Chinese international students remain

who they are in the face of difference?

Scene Three

“Do you want some coffee?” asked Danielle.

“No, thank you. I am not a coffee drinker.” I smiled.

“So you want some tea instead?”

“No, I am good. I don’t drink tea either.”

“You don’t? I thought you are Chinese!”

“Well, I guess I am not Chinese enough.” I had to say so, with a fake smile.

Tea drinker? Do I have to drink tea because I am Chinese? Why do people assume that certain groups of people practice certain things? Where did they get those assumptions? There have been numerous times that I felt compelled to tell my friends that I am not a coffee drinker when they suggested that we “grab a cup of coffee.” However, I never did simply because I did not want to turn their hospitalities down, and I did not wish to be called “weird” again, as I wanted to be like them. However, I felt embarrassed standing at Starbucks when I had to “grab a cup of coffee,” with no idea what to order, simply because I did not know those complicated names for different kinds of coffee. Similar situations happen with restaurant ordering as well. I wonder whether those are signs of my adjusting incapability. What does it take to fully embrace a new culture? What do we do as international students to not feel culturally displaced in this new place? What does it take for “implacement” to happen in the midst of difference (Casey, 2009)?

Scene Four

“Yali! You look so cute today!”

“Thank you.” I smiled back.

“Do you have a meeting today?”

“No.”

“You have a date after work!”

“No.”

“But you look so fancy nice today, on a Friday!”

I responded with a fake smile, as I could not come up with anything else.

What is wrong with wearing a dress? Am I supposed to wear jeans every day? What if I do not want to? Am I not supposed to be the person who is in charge of whatever I want to wear, in whatever ways? Do I have to conform to the office culture of “dress down Friday”? Why do those trivial things like cheese, coffee, or dress bother me? Wu (1991) states that a foreigner, “like standing in front of a mirror, notices a lot of things that oneself did not see before” (p. 269). I did not realize that it was an obvious issue that I did not drink tea or coffee when I was in China. Neither did I realize that the most basic things in living such as food could be extremely hard to figure out as well. Might it be that we come to understand our culture best when we live outside of it for a time? How do we choose to present ourselves in a new surrounding? What does it mean to fit in? What is the outcome of fitting in? Once we fit in, can we fit out?

Scene Five

“Bang bang bang!” I heard a series of strong and harsh knocks on my apartment door.

As I anticipated, it was the manager from the leasing office staring at me. I knew what it was going to be about.

“Come on, lady, work with me, OK? I already informed you so many times. No laundry hanging on the balcony! If you continue to do so, you will be fined because you violated the leasing agreement.” Her sharp voice went directly into my ears.

I never used a dryer to dry clothes until I came to the U.S. We usually sun dry our laundry in China, like people in many countries do. We believe that not only is it environmentally friendly, but also antiseptic. But it seems that not many Americans do it, as most of them dry their laundry in a dryer. I tried to convince myself to “do as the Romans do;” however, this seemingly trivial laundry incident got me into deep thinking: There is nothing wrong with me hanging my laundry out, yet I had been told not to repeat my action anymore. I feel that my privacy had been intruded. Or is the concept of privacy

played out differently in a culture that I do not understand?

Cultural Land

I often ask myself: am I too sensitive to other people's opinions? Can I ignore them or let them go? Why am I being called "weird"? Am I really "weird"? *Weird*, developed from Middle English, which was used to describe the weird sisters for the three fates or Norns (in Germanic mythology), the goddesses who controlled human destiny. They were usually portrayed as odd or frightening in appearance, as in "Macbeth" by Shakespeare, which led to the meaning of "odd looking, uncanny" (first recorded in 1815), or "strange or unusual appearance" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). I was called weird not because of my weird look, but due to my "weird" way of doing things, which is hard for my non-Chinese friends to understand. In the meanwhile, I do not understand why they reacted certain ways to my actions either. Why is it so difficult for us to understand each other? Is it simply because we are from different places? Is there an association between place and culture?

Culture, from Middle French *culture*, means "the tilling of land" and from Latin *cultura* means "a cultivating, agriculture," figuratively "care, culture, an honoring"; it first started meaning "collective customs and achievements of a people" in 1867¹. The tilling and cultivation of land certainly cannot exist without the essential component, land, which is highly associated with weather, climate, rituals, customs, and even people, depending on where it is located on earth. In China, we say 一方水土养一方人, *yi fang shui tu yang yi fang ren*, meaning the particular land that a group of people is from shapes that group. Hom (1999) also makes the differentiation yet connection between "from" and "form": "the place(s) I come 'from', the origins beyond territorial location, certainly

¹ All etymological references were retrieved from www.etymonline.com in 2011-2014, unless specified.

shapes, ‘forms’ how I am becoming who I am, and how I come to view the world” (p. 127).

Charlayne Hunter-Gault, a young black woman who integrated the University of Georgia during the Civil Rights era, writes fondly of her Southern home in a memoir named *In My Place*:

Evocative sights, sounds, and smells of my small-town childhood, the almost overpowering sweet smell of honeysuckle and banana shrub seducing buzzing bumblebees and yellow jackets; the screeching cries of crickets emanating from every shrub and bush; clouds of black starlings producing shadows wherever they flew over the dusty red-clay haze. This was the part of the South that I loved, that made me happy to be a Southerner, that left me unaffected by the seamier side... (Berlin, 2010, p. 27)

Maya Angelou comments on Hunter-Gault’s words, “I do believe, once a Southerner, always a Southerner” (as cited in Berlin, 2010, p. 27). Not only do places shape who we are, but also we have that special emotional attachment to the places that raised us, which seemingly can never be cut off.

Duality of Self

South and North, China and U.S, Asia and America... Regardless of what place we are from, are we indeed different? If so, how different are we? What does it mean to have differences? How do Chinese international students survive in a place full of differences? Wu (1991) contends that a foreigner has a duality of self in a different country:

I have two “me”s inside myself. A “me” with whom I am familiar and with whom I feel connected. This is the “me” I enjoyed and was proud of. And I am still proud of it and would not let it go. The other “me” is a stranger. It is like a distorted figure that always appears whenever I am in the darkness of foreignness. I cannot accept it because I do not like to. I cannot reject it either because it is part of my own self. My old half hates my newly discovered half. It is also the newly acquired value that fights against the old value in my old half. (p. 271)

How does it feel to be “half” and “half”? How can a person handle the conflict between

the two “half”s, the familiar one that she or he loves while the unfamiliar one that she or he hates? Can the part that one loves be held forever? Can the part that one refuses to accept be permanently kept away?

Besides the inner conflict within oneself, how do foreigners see and react to the differences and dissimilarities that arise from daily activities? Wu (1991) states that foreigners see their dissimilarities as flaws to cover, to get rid of, and have the idea that they must conform to the dominant culture. What will happen to those Chinese students similar to, yet different, from me? Will they try to get rid of their differences to reorganize and reshape themselves? Do they have to change to “fit in”? But, does change necessarily have to mean conform?

Wu (1991) contends that a foreigner has gone through a profound change, after the disintegration and reorganization of self and the new establishment with the new world: “To regain peace and confidence, reorganization or reshaping of self is needed. This process is threatening, as one has to alter one’s own identity, in order to accept this reincarnation” (p. 271). I wonder whether those students have to alter their own identities? Have they changed already but did not realize it? What are their experiences like in the U.S? The question that drives my study is: **What are the lived experiences of Chinese international graduate students living in the United States?**

A Contrast in Visits: What Does It Mean to Return?

This is my second stay in the U.S. I came to the U.S. for the first time as an exchange student when I was a senior undergraduate. I clearly remember both experiences and the different impact that each had. The former felt like I was going on a vacation or taking a short trip, and I knew clearly that I would soon return. The latter felt like I was moving somewhere permanently, leaving everything familiar behind: family,

friends, and memories. It felt like I had a round-trip ticket for the first visit, while only holding a one-way ticket for the second visit, with no idea when I would return. Why did I feel that way? Does the length of stay in a place matter and influence how a person feels? Why did it feel like an ordeal the second time I came?

When I came for the first time, it was all about the excitement of being in a different country, the crystal blue sky that only few places in China have, and curiosity to experience college life here. It felt similar to what Wu (1991) was feeling when he first went to a foreign country, Germany. Both Wu and I had nothing to worry about, because we knew that we were taken care of--for him, by nice German hosts and for me, by the host university, University of Oklahoma and the warm family-felt community. Similar to Wu, coming to the U.S. was my first time to be abroad. That nine-month stay felt like a month, too short for me. As Americans say, "Time flies when you are having fun." I did have tremendous fun and met many friends of various backgrounds, Americans, international friends, and certainly Chinese too. It was such a nice and warm community. For some reason, I felt at home there, although the first impression of the country was quite interesting:

Nervous, anxious, worried, but more excited, I boarded on my first flight on August 11th, 2006, UA 888 to San Francisco, then Denver, and then Oklahoma City. I can't believe that I am going to America. It is like a dream! A few deep impressions of the U.S. on the first day: I had to adjust my watch wherever I went. Why don't they just set a standard time for everyone to use to make things easier? Second, it was HOT in America, over 100 degrees, and my skin quickly picked up the heat and absorbed the darkness, and I looked like a child from Africa! Even a friend I met later commented that he had never met a Chinese person who was as dark as me! Another Chinese friend even thought that I was from Malaysia purely based on my skin color. Third, America does not have delicious food: they drink black coffee as bitter as Chinese herbal medicine and eat donuts too sweet to a degree that I thought sugar was the main ingredient instead of flour! (Personal reflection, 2010)

What a fun and unforgettable experience! I am grateful that I had a chance to spend one academic year there; I am thankful that I had a wonderful host family who treated me as their own, and with whom I shared tremendous joy and laughter. I will cherish the cozy moments that we shared every weekend, although I did not live with them in their house.

Following the Oklahoma exchange program, I left for China for my undergraduate graduation. Only after three months of stay at home, I returned to the U.S, the country that I missed and loved. Yet it felt strange to me, the excitement of returning that I imagined in China disappeared. I wanted to go home to China the minute that I landed in this land for a second time, August 20, 2007. I wondered what happened to the strength and courage that I possessed, to argue with and convince my mom to give me the permission to come to the U.S. for a second time? I wondered what happened to my embrace and strong adaptability to a new environment? I wondered what would happen to me? I wondered. I wandered. I worried. I wished. There were too many people at the airport: departing, landing, walking, running, talking, eating, laughing, shouting, screaming, but I knew nobody there.

After I claimed my luggage, worried how to get hold of the person who was coming to pick me up, without a cell phone, I saw a sign with my name in Chinese on it, next to which stood a woman with a great smile. At that moment, I felt warm and welcomed, yet a little bit surprised by the familiar Chinese writing, because that is my name, my real name! I felt somewhat special. She is a very nice, calm lady, also a graduate student back then. I accepted her offer to fix me some dinner at her place before heading to my temporary housing. To my surprise, she did not provide me instant noodles as a stranger; instead she prepared some homemade noodles, with vegetables, eggs, and

shrimp. I almost cried, as I did not expect a stranger could be so nice to me, taking her time and patience to take care of me. The steam of the hot broth and the beautiful color combination of the food reminded me of home, where mom always cooks healthy and beautiful food. But at that moment, I felt at home.

She helped me carry my luggage into the “welcome house,” coordinated and arranged by the Chinese Student and Scholar Association (CSSA) at the University of Maryland. It was a three-bedroom apartment, with mattresses on the floor everywhere, even in the walk-in closet. A second surprise. At first I thought I ended up in a refugee camp rather than a “welcome house” for students to pursue advanced degrees. There were girls and boys sleeping on those mattresses, and I could not believe the contrast between where I just came from and where I was about to live temporarily until I found my own housing. I thought I came from a developing country to a developed one, but it just seemed quite the opposite. The restroom was with strong odor, the color of toilet and bathtub disgusting, the light dim, and trash everywhere in the kitchen. My scream woke everyone up in the room when I saw some black bugs crawling along the sink. For the first time in my life, I realized the existence of a creature called cockroach. I could not believe that this was happening in 美国, *mei guo*, the beautiful country as we call it in Chinese (Li, 2002). I tried to convince myself that this was not taking place in the enchanted best country in the world, the claimed “land of opportunities,” the land where people come to achieve their American dreams. I had the desire to throw up; I wanted to escape, and never return.

It was a sleepless night. I was weeping the whole night. I wanted to cry like a child, but I couldn't, because I would wake up people again in the room and they would

think that I am a coward or weird, even on the first day that I arrived! I started to question and even regret my decision of having fought against my mother's resistance to come to the U.S. to study for a second time. Why did I not listen to her to look for a comfortable job and live a stable life in China? What am I here for? I wished that I had never come to the U.S. before so that I would not have had the idea of coming back again. How am I going to live here without anyone I know? When can I go home? That night was too long to pass. I wept, questioned, regretted, and prayed. Eventually the dawn had come. Only one more night to stay in this camp. Only a few months away until Christmas, when I can go home.

In Search of Home

Home is a place where we feel comfortable being ourselves. We all exert our utmost to find the place that we can call home, especially when we are away from home in a foreign country. For some it might be easy, while for others difficult, as if there were some invisible doors that needed to be opened, only they could not be reached.

Open and Closed Doors

Tyagi (1996) writes:

As a 'non-resident alien' during the first few years of my life here, it was clearly that even the possibility of home was to be denied in the language of classification. Not only was I 'alien', I seemingly did not even reside here. (p. 45)

Even after Tyagi applied for the change of immigration status in the U.S, she became a "resident alien," a name chosen by the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). Regardless of her status change, she was still an alien. *Alien* etymologically means "a stranger, a foreigner". She was a foreigner. I am a foreigner too. *Foreign*, mid 13th century, *ferren*, *foreyne*, means "out of doors," from Old French *forain* meaning "strange, foreign; outer, external, outdoor; remote, out-of-the-way". The sense of "not in one's own

land" is first attested in the late 14th century, and it also means excluded, kept away, alien in character; not related to or concerned with the matter under consideration; irrelevant, dissimilar, or inappropriate (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). I wonder what kind of doors are there and how many? If it is the country door, how is it that I am still outside? Isn't it true that my feet are already in the land of the U.S.? But isn't it also true that many people feel that they are outsiders even though they are inside?

Foreigners are inside, but foreigners are still outside. Agnew (2005) writes, "The sense of being an outsider or a foreigner can make the individuals feel alienated and heighten feelings of sadness, nostalgia, and create a longing for home" (p. 42). But where is home? Is it where we live? A good friend of mine, Bai, told me that she would never consider the U.S. as her home, although she had already become an immigrant and will reside here for another good amount of time in her life. She indicates that she will always be Chinese, although in a sense she is American:

My root will always be in China, that's my starting point and will be my ending point. I feel I am a foreigner and this is not my home. I only consider U.S. as one stop in my journey. If you consider somewhere to be home, you want to be there forever, but I don't want to be here forever. Home is somewhere somehow to die there, somewhere that I dream of.

Bai's interpretation of home echoes with mine: for the first few years in the U.S., I always referred to my apartment as "where I stay" instead of calling it home. I still do not feel comfortable calling my apartment home, because to me my apartment is only a physical house, but home is an emotional haven, where familiarity, intimacy, coziness and something permanent can persist over time and space.

House vs. Home

Sitting in my room,
Thinking of my home,
Am I not at home in this room?

What is this room?
Maybe only a physical room,
But not an emotional room.

Sit still, get up, wander,
I switch between positions,
I try to place myself,
And I try to find a place.
(Yali Pan, Personal reflection, 02/16/2012)

Otto Bollow's (1962) *Lived-Space* also asks questions to differentiate a "house" and "home": "But after I have returned to my place of residence, am I really 'at home' there? Where is my real home" (p. 35)? I cannot help asking: Do Chinese international graduate students call their places of residence in the U.S. "home"? What and where is home?

Home, old English *hám*, Old High German *heim*, means, "Dwelling, house, estate, village." The slang phrase "make (oneself) at home, become comfortable in a place one does not live" dates from 1892. O'Donohue (1999) in *Eternal Echoes* writes, "The word 'home' has a wonderful resonance. Home is where you belong. It is your shelter and place of rest, the place where you can be yourself" (p. 32). It means that if I am at home, I am comfortable, but if I am not, can I make myself at home? Goyen (1975) writes in his novel *House of Breath*:

People could come into the world in a place they could not at first even name and had never known before; and that out of a nameless and unknown place they could grow and move around in it until its name they knew and called with love, and call it HOME, and put roots there and love others there; so that whenever they left this place they would sing homesick songs about it and write poems of yearning for it, like a lover... (p. 40)

I wonder after living in the U.S. for a while, will I fall in love with this country? Will I miss it and be "homesick"? Will I have the desire to write a poem to yearn for it? Will other Chinese students do the same?

The “Place” of Home

Home is a place, but more than a place. It is a place where we begin our life journeys. It is a place with emotions:

A home is a place where a set of different destinies begin to articulate and define themselves. It is the cradle of one’s future. Home is the place where strangers arrive, the place where you see things for the first time. Here you first begin to know that you have a body. You come to know smell, touch, and hearing. Home is the place where your infant senses are fostered. You have been on a long journey; now you settle and learn to recognize things. (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 31)

Home is a special place. This special place can be at any locale: California, Chicago, West Virginia. Home can be in the woods, along a river, in the mountain, on a plateau. Home can be a thing, a dish, a book, a piece of cloth. Home can be a person, a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a lover, a friend. Home can be a feeling: sweet, sour, bitter, spicy. Home can be sensuous, by touching, smelling, seeing, hearing, or synaesthesia, the fusion of all of them (Abram, 1996). Home means different things to different people. But the emotional attachment to home is universal, and no one can take it away from us. We all want to go home, to our sweet home, to where we belong, to the place we dream of, just as Robert Johnson’s *Sweet Home Chicago*:

Oh, baby, don’t you want to go?
Back to the land of California, to my sweet home, Chicago.

There is a similar sentiment in John Denver’s *Country Roads*:

Country roads,
Take me home,
To the place
I belong,
West Virginia,
Mountain Momma,
Take me home,
Country roads.

Home is a place of belonging. “It is also the primordial sense of the need for security, of

being held, of belonging” (Shaw, 1990, p. 227). Coming from China to the U.S, Chinese graduate students face more uncertainties than certainties; feel more insecure since everything is unknown and unpredictable. How do they strive to build a place that they can call home and feel a sense of belonging in the midst of uncertainties and differences?

Home and Belonging

“To be human is to belong” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 71). We belong to different homes, organizations, communities, and countries, among which home is usually the first unit that we belong to, which is the “most powerful structure of human belonging in the world” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 30). People all over the world try to build this powerful belonging structure—home. One time, I was having dinner with a close friend and one of the topics that we discussed was house purchasing. He told me that he wanted to purchase a house for his family, because he is tired of renting and moving. He said: “It would be good to have a house that we know it belongs to us, in which we can feel a sense of belonging in this foreign land.” Indeed, I agree with him: rental culture is not as common in China as it is in the U.S. Chinese people value and prioritize “home.” There is a saying in China, 成家立业 *cheng jia li ye*, which means to form a family and establish a career. *Chengjia* comes before *liye*. The presupposition is that a person (especially a man in old times) can concentrate his career by having a family started first. Usually the time to start a family also indicates a time to purchase a house, where a person can have the ownership and feel a sense of belonging.

Belong, composed of *be* (Old English *beon*, *beom*, *bion*, meaning be, exist, come to be, become) + *long* (Old English *langian* to yearn), means to “to go along with, relate to.” *Belong* has the connotation of becoming something, which indicates that it is a

process, from not knowing, non-relevance to being relevant to people's lives, from isolation to intimacy by building a bridge across the distance (O' Donohue, 1999).

Li Bai (701-762 A.D.), a renowned poet from the Tang Dynasty, expressed his nostalgia in the following lines:

静夜思 Night Thoughts

床前明月光
疑是地上霜
举头望明月
低头思故乡

The moon shines over the end of my bed
I suspect it be the frost on the ground
I raise my head to look at the shining moon
Nostalgia arises when I look down
(My Translation)

The moonlight is not the same in a different place, and it looks like frost. How could he think that it was the frost rather than the moonlight enveloping the place, even though the color of the two is similar? He was away from home, away from his root. There is an old Chinese saying, 落叶归根 *luo ye gui gen*, meaning fallen leaves eventually return to where their roots are. It has a further implication and connotation that a person, who resides in a foreign land, will eventually go back to his/her root.

The “Root” of Home

The equivalence of root in Chinese is 根 *gen*, to which there are many phrases and meanings attached. Wang (1994) writes that at one level aside from its basic biological meaning, the word *gen* symbolizes the genesis and maintenance of life. It is used to designate one's birthplace, ancestral village, or native place, and also the source from which one derives one's personal identity: “Identity here is inextricably tied to and equated with one's ancestral village. The bond to one's roots is unique, sacred, and eternal” (p. 186). Wang writes that at another level, especially among overseas Chinese, *gen* has the meaning of Chinese culture and a geographic entity called China, one's 祖国

zuguo (motherland), in which *zu* means ancestral, and *guo* means country or nation.

Wang says: “It is the bond between overseas Chinese and China that undergirds the unique racial and cultural identity of the overseas Chinese” (pp. 186-187). For overseas Chinese, be it immigrants, refugees, or international students, I wonder what they will do: *luo ye gui gen* 落叶归根 (go back to where their roots are) or *luo di sheng gen* 落地生根 (planting one’s roots in a foreign soil)? How does the concept of root (*gen*) influence and guide their lives while being away from home?

Norris (1990) writes that not to be at home is to be displaced, and to be uprooted. *Root*, *wyrtruma* and *wyrtwala* in Old English, means, “The underground part of a plant used for eating or as a source of medicine” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). The plant stems from the root, from which it absorbs water and nutrients, and without which it will wither and later die. If we move the plant, there are two possibilities: either to adapt and survive, or to die because of the susceptibility to diseases due to the misfit of the new soil. That is the outcome of being uprooted or rootless. There is a saying in China, “橘生淮南则为橘, 淮北则为枳 *ju sheng huai nan ze wei ju, huai bei ze wei zhi*”, meaning that the orange that grows on the North side of the *Huai* River will be orange, but when it is moved to the South side, it will not be orange, rather something else. The orange did not die; rather it survived, but changed to something else. I wonder whether Chinese international students change to something else other than being themselves? What are the factors that drive those changes? What are the transformations that occur with international students living in a foreign place?

Transformative Change

Change, derived from Latin *cambiare*, means “to bend, crook.” We have to bend

to go into a cave, or go through a short door; we have to bend to be hidden in a limited space; sometimes we have to bend rules or life principles. Things that don't bend will break. Like trees, who we are today, is different from who we were yesterday. We are 'beings' of change. Change is a constant transformation. Is change good or bad? Are changes voluntary or involuntary? What are the aspects of change?

Name Change

One of the first and most frequently encountered questions after I came to the U.S. certainly was "What's your name?" followed by, "Do you have an English name?" I will definitely answer "No" now, simply because first I do not have one, and second I do not need one. However, I did give myself an English name when I first came to the U.S, Liya (I reversed my name from Yali to Liya) to make it sound more like Leah, the American name. It took me a while to get used to my new "American" name, as oftentimes I did not know that people were referring to me while using the English name given by myself. However, I felt that I was hiding not only my real name, but also part of me. So I changed back to my original name. To many Americans, the task of pronouncing some Chinese names, however, not twisting their original meanings seems very difficult. Therefore, in order to make their lives easier, many Chinese and other international students start to give themselves English names.

A friend of mine, Tina once told me, "My first name is 鹤 *He*, you know, just like 'he', the boy, and I hate being referred as 'he' tons of times. You really do not know what to do. They simply cannot pronounce it. So I just started using 'Tina.'" In order to avoid these name mispronunciations, misunderstandings, discomfort, embarrassment, and drama, we choose to give up and give in: we give ourselves English names. I wonder if it

is simply a fact of naming and renaming? What does it really mean to give ourselves names that mean nothing to us, while giving up our original ones? Does it make a person more American by simply having an American name? Does the change of name affect who we are and how we identify ourselves, and even how we are perceived?

System Change

I went to Cuba to visit my best friend during a time that her parents were visiting her. There are railways that go through the city of Havana. One day when we were passing the rail, her father commented on the traits of the Cuban rail and compared the rails in Cuba and in China, such as structure, material, width, etc. The conversation was mostly held between her father and mother, as they both work for the railway system in China. My friend and I were clueless of what they were talking about. In order to show my courtesy and to get a better understanding of their conversation, I asked him: “But are the rails the same?” “Of course not! That’s why I was comparing them. You have to change wheels sometimes when the train needs to make a transition from one country to another, such as China and Cuba.” Then he started to elaborate on the differences, and I more and more was lost in the conversation, but I clearly understood the “difference” part that he was trying to emphasize. In order for the train to move forward smoothly in the incoming country, there is an inevitable change of wheels if the rail systems in two countries are different. Will it be a smooth transition from different rails with different widths, different systems, and different everything? Will it be bumpy and potentially dangerous? How do the passengers feel during the transition?

Having realized that the wheels had been changed when she was traveling from China to the Republic of Mongolia back in the 1980s, Zhang (1999) says:

I paced the dimly lit platform, awed by the immensity of the metamorphosis, the

foregrounded materiality of the train, and the nakedness of the rails underneath. I felt that something was crumbling in me, that something had irretrievably changed my vision. In retrospect, it is no exaggeration to say that this was a veritable disjuncture in my life. The train left the Chinese rails behind, as if leaving behind a pair of amputated limbs that stretched all the way back to Shanghai. When things seemed to be back to normal on the train, I was told that the Chinese restaurant car was also left behind at the border. From the morning after, the passengers would be served Russian food in the newly hooked up restaurant car. I would not know how and what to order.

I was unable to sleep. Never in my life had I been so concerned about the mechanical structure of a train, or for that matter, the railway system worldwide. Lying in my narrow berth, I listened to the rhythm of the new wheels and worried over whether they really matched the new rails. (pp. 56-57)

The sense of unfamiliarity, worrying, and anxiety do not only apply to Zhang. These fears might be what Chinese international students feel as well when they first come to the U.S, concerning food, transportation, adjustment, and other possible changes: being concerned with how they will survive in this new country, while being away from home.

Nostalgia for Home

Matt (2011) writes that immigrants find themselves lonely in a foreign country, particularly during holidays, because “holidays bring back potent memories of family gatherings and togetherness, of familiar rituals that seem to transcend time but could not transcend space” (p. 150). Wang Wei (701-761, A.D.), a renowned poet from the Tang Dynasty in Chinese history, wrote a poem to share the same sentiment.

九月九日忆山东兄弟 *Missing my fellows on September ninth*²

独在异乡为异客
每逢佳节倍思亲
遥知兄弟登高处
遍插茱萸少一人

Being a foreigner alone in a foreign land
Nostalgia culminates on holidays
Knowing that my fellows are hiking somewhere
They also realize that one person is missing

² Sept. 9th here does not mean the actual Sept. 9th, rather the 9th day of the Ninth month in Chinese Lunar Calendar, which is a traditional holiday for Chinese, Chong Yang Jie, a holiday for family reunion. The tradition in some places in Northern China is that people go hiking with Zhu Yu (a kind of herb inserted into their hair), to get rid of all the bad luck.

(My Translation)

At the age of seventeen, Wang Wei composed this piece that is well known even today. He wrote this poem while he was pursuing his government career in the capital city back then, Chang'an, which was about four hundred miles away from his home. Chang'an appealed to many people who wanted a government career; however, to him, he felt more like a stranger, wanderer, lonely in the crowded and high-paced city. He was not at home. He was lonely on holidays.

Indeed, nostalgia culminates on holidays, especially during Christmas time for me, when most people go home to reunite with their families and loved ones in their cozy homes filled with fireplaces, delicious holiday food, joy and laughter. Bachelard (1994) comments: "We feel warm because it is cold out-of doors... A reminder of winter strengthens the happiness of inhabiting. In the reign of the imagination alone, a reminder of winter increases the house's value as a place to live in" (pp. 39-40). I agree with Bachelard about the extreme coziness and happiness that we feel in winter times when we are indoors, but only under the condition that families and loved ones accompany us. However, when the room is empty with no loved ones around, there is no difference between inside and outside: it is cold. The warmth of being indoors can only be manifested and appreciated when we are at home, cozy and sweet home. That is perhaps why when I have the option to spend holidays with my American friends and families, I usually choose not to. I am deeply aware that their family reunions and laughter will remind me of the fact that I am away from home, that I feel lonely even in an environment full of people, and how miserable I am, in a sense, homeless. Sometimes I try to convince myself that I would be OK without going home around holiday time;

however, I always end up unable to suppress my feelings and make a last minute decision to go home, as if it were unstoppable. I miss home.

Mother's Presence/Absence

When we miss home, we actually miss our mothers; when we miss mother, we actually miss the extensive and unconditional love. When we miss love, we actually miss the warmth as wide as the universe and a sacred responsibility. (Bi, 1998, p. 2, my translation)

When we miss home, we are not necessarily missing one particular item or its framework; instead, we miss all its content, which are all deeply entrenched in love, especially a mother's love. I wonder if this love changes due to the change of the locality? Kristeva (1991) says that foreigners are people who have lost their mothers. I wonder whether I have lost my mother in a sense that I have been away from her for so long?

The time to leave home is always an emotional one, especially for mothers, no matter if we are going for a weekend trip, leaving for another country to study, or moving somewhere permanently. I remember every time that my mom simply would not be able to control herself and cry for days prior to my trip. She jokes about it, "My heart is not in my tummy while you are away," meaning that she is constantly worried about me. She is concerned about my daily diet, my driving practice, my study, and my "personal issue," referring to my relationship status. Sometimes when I do not contact her for a period of time that goes beyond the time that she can tolerate not talking to me, she will be sad and mad. The first thing that she will say to me when I finally call is, "Do not call me mother, I am not your mother!" Then she will complain to me what a difficult time she went through in the past few days without hearing from me. She will try to come up with all kinds of possibilities to scare herself and try to imagine that something bad might have

happened to me, natural disasters, school shooting, terrorism, etc. When she finds out that I am fine, she will still urge me to come back home as soon as I get my degree and will express that she regretted her decision of having permitted me to study in the U.S. for a second time.

I used to get annoyed by her hyper anxiety about my life in the U.S. and tried to explain to her that the U.S. is not as “chaotic and unsafe” as she thinks. She will always comment: “You would never fully understand me until you yourself become a mother.” Sharing with my friends who have similar experiences, and seeing that many of my friends become mothers, I am becoming more understanding. I try to step into her shoes, and I try to understand what it means to be a mother, especially a mother with children thousands of miles away.

Meng Jiao (751-874A.D.), a poet from the Tang Dynasty, wrote a famous poem on a mother’s love through the lens of the traveling child. It reads as follows:

游子吟 *The Poem on the Traveling Child*

慈母手中线，
游子身上衣。
临行密密缝，
意恐迟迟归。
谁言寸草心，
报得三春晖。

The thread in the mother’s hands,
The clothes on the traveling Child.
She sewed again and again before s/he departs,
Being afraid that the child would not return on time.
Who could name this big heart?
Only repay the kindness of this generous love.
(My translation)

The child is traveling alone, yet is not alone. She is accompanied with the hope, expectation, anxiety, and waiting of a loving mother, who is concerned about the child’s food and shelter, every trivial aspect in life, and whether the child can take care of him/herself.

In order to assure my family that I am strong and independent enough to take care of myself in the U.S, I try to act like a grown-up. I only report the good news to them,

and refuse to mention anything that might cause extra concern and anxiety for them. Caren Lundgren, who emigrated from Sweden to the U.S. in 1921, acted similarly in order to reduce the anxiety and worry of her family. She said, “When I wrote home, I had to be so careful about getting tears on the paper,” even though she was very homesick and lonely at the time (as cited in Matt, 2011, p. 144). No matter how hard life is, I try to keep it to myself, and try not to expose my emotions to my family, which certainly makes it even harder for me, as I have to carry everything by myself. Although I hesitate to unfold the negative side of my life to my family, it still feels nice to talk with them, as their voices and concern can make my restless heart restful. O’Donohue (1999) writes, “Amidst the cut and thrust of life, especially when times are difficult, it is great to know that you have your family” (p. 31). I wonder how my study participants handle tough times? Do they only 报喜不报忧, *bao xi bu bao you* (meaning only to report good news rather than bad news) as well like Caren and I did? Can they seek soothing among the Chinese students and communities in the U.S? Is it the same? Can this sense of closeness be created overseas? Does the sense of uprootedness unite them so that they can sympathize with and feel one another’s worries?

Qin 亲 and Cohesiveness among Chinese Overseas

In my preliminary research, the expression 亲 *qin* (closeness) in Chinese culture emerged as a theme. 亲人 *Qin ren* (people that you are close to) means families. Students consider their fellow students as their families here as they feel close to, cared about and loved by their peers from China. Comments from them are as follows:

Qin 亲 is inexpressible, you just feel that you are from the same root, share the same values, concerned with the same things, and they understand your position better. It is *qin* 亲 that connects us together, especially when everyone is away from home. (James)

You can hang out, chat, and have fun with Americans, but for me, those truly really close friends, for me, cannot be foreigners. (Angela)

Because you feel *qin* 亲 with your Chinese friends, it's like the feeling of your family members overseas. You feel comfortable to bother your Chinese friends, such as asking for a ride if I missed the morning bus but had to teach an eight am session. (Ryan)

Because we are here, we are experiencing similar things, a lot of things we feel for each other, and through meeting with friends, hanging out, and interacting with friends, that definitely creates a social support group. That definitely is another positive experience, although I can always get this social support in China, but it may not appear to be so salient, because you are used to that kind of friendship in China. But here social support and friendships are so important to make your life so much happier. (Michelle)

Having heard these words and reflecting on my own experience, I begin to modify my prejudice towards the “clustering phenomenon” of many Chinese people. At the same time, I ask myself: Am I not the same? Isn't it true that I feel more comfortable to bother my Chinese friends when encountering some issues and problems? Isn't it also true that I have many Chinese friends as well? Why am I using double standards for the many similar things that we do? By comparison and reflection, I begin to have a better understanding of our situation: we want to be in a community where we can feel cared for and loved, where we can feel at home. It is the same root and similar longing to belong that binds us together. I should not blame them for trying to look for a comfort zone in which they can be themselves and seek to make their lives easier.

The “cluster phenomenon” does not only exist among Chinese international students, but also resides among the international student population in general. Bochner et al. (1977) contend that international students belong to three kinds of social networks, in descending order of salience: (a) a co-national network whose function is to affirm and express the culture of origin; (b) a network with host nationals, whose function is the

instrumental facilitation of academic and professional aspirations; and (c) a multinational network whose main function is recreational.

Gareis (2012) studied the intercultural friendships among 454 international students (about equal number of male and female students) in the United States. Over a third of them did not have close American friends, and international students in general are not satisfied with the number and the quality of their friendships with Americans. I start to wonder about the real reasons for the few friendships that international students establish with Americans. Ward and Masgoret (2004) notice that a third of the international students in New Zealand believed that their English competence hindered their ability to establish friendships with New Zealanders. Gareis also notes that cultural similarity, intercultural communication competence, personality and identity are also factors that influence international students' interaction with the locals.

In Gareis's (2012) research, one Taiwanese female student described: "I did not expect that it is so hard to make friends with Americans. Usually I do not know what to say with them and I guess they do not either" (2012, p. 321). Is the issue of international students not having friendships with Americans due to the fault of those students themselves? Or can it partially be attributed to the host region as well, such as whether it is a metropolitan area, North or South, or whether the local people that international students interact with are interested in developing international friendships as Gareis indicates?

Many of my Chinese friends say, "When you have something that is a concern, you will always go to Chinese friends. It just comes naturally." Yes, I have to admit that it "comes naturally": when I need some financial assistance, or have some difficulties, I

naturally turn to my Chinese friends first. I am afraid whether it would be inappropriate to ask my American friends, whether I would offend them by being ignorant of some cultural nuances, whether I would accidentally step into some taboo, whether I would intrude on their privacy, whether... There are a lot of worries and concerns involved. In order to have our life as trouble-free as possible, we turn to our home fellows.

But why are Chinese students close to other international students? Is it because they encounter similar situations? Is it because everyone is foreign in a sense? Is it because we feel somewhat connected deep inside? Among international students, no one needs to worry about having an accent, as everyone has some sort of accent. No one has to worry about being the only one who responds in confusion to slang or has no knowledge to understand a joke. Similar experiences bond Chinese international students and other international students together where they can try to build a community of their own in the U.S.

The Difference in Routine

Coming to a new country means that routine life is different, as an international student from Serbia described: “Those routines that we had back at home are now disturbed and we have to rebuild them.” Even trivial but basic aspects of life can be disturbed and different, which include but are not limited to food, transportation, greeting, and language.

Food Is Big

I anticipated some differences including food and diet prior to my visit to the U.S, yet never imagined that simple things as grocery shopping can be a difficult task with which I had to seek help sometimes. The seemingly simple purchase act in a different country goes beyond a monetary transaction; instead, it is more personal, experiential,

and cultural. Food matters for all people in all times (Diner, 2001). In China we say, 民以食为天, *min yi shi wei tian*, meaning that food is the most important thing in a person's life, which is rather true: an individual needs food to survive, live, then thrive. Norris (1990) writes, "Food is comfort, home, who we are" (p. 240). Food has its own inexplicable magical power, such that as my friend Wong describes, that authentic HongKongese food can cure his homesickness. Matt (2011) writes that many homesick immigrants yearn for and remember the simple repasts that they had enjoyed at their mothers' tables.

Ida Lindgren, a homesick Swedish immigrant living in Kansas, wrote her mother in 1870, "Do you know what I miss here most in the way of food? Really good sour-sweet rye bread and a glass of fruit drink, for such things do not exist here." Berta Kingstad, an immigrant from Norway, had a similar complaint, and she wrote her family in 1886, "I often wish I were at home and could sit at the table with you and eat those delicious fresh potatoes and fish" (both citations in Matt, 2011, p. 156). Certainly the scenario has significantly changed due to technology and transportation: immigrants have more access to their own ethnic foods in many ways. Still food goes beyond what fills up one's stomach; rather, to a larger extent it resembles something emotionally and socially. Diner (2001) says, "Food is not only material items, but also reflects symbols of identity, and it amounts to a journey to the heart of a group of people" (pp. 9-10). When we are tired from the day, we wish there would be a home-made dinner waiting for us. When we are sick or uncomfortable, we wish that the food we used to eat in childhood could somehow be available. When we celebrate holidays, we wish the feast that we had back at home could be served. When we are happy, we like to eat together with family and

friends. When we are unhappy, some of us like to eat in order to get rid of the sadness, especially food that can recall some pleasant memories. Food is more a symbol that elicits home, familiar faces and accompanying joy. It is an attachment. Food is a feeling, an emotion, and a reminder of home.

Among those students that I talked with in my preliminary research, the very first thing that the majority of them do when they return home is to “eat a lot of good food, especially mom’s home-made food.” Food plays a big part in Chinese culture. Even the Chinese traditional greeting, involves food, “Have you eaten?” Not until I came to the U.S. did I realize the significance and special meaning of this simple, yet warm, greeting. It feels genuine: that the person cares about your survival and your well-being. It is plain, yet genuine, care without decoration. It might sound silly to ask a person whether s/he has eaten to people who do not have knowledge of Chinese culture. Only when a person is fed can s/he function well in all kinds of activities. Like other Chinese students, the first thing that I do when I go home is to eat mom’s food, which I do not have the luxury to eat in the States. The smell and taste of a bowl of hot soup constantly reminds me that I am at home, cozy, sweet home, especially under severe weather where it gets single digit degrees in the `wintertime in the Northwest part of China. Bachelard (1994) writes, “Everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate” (p. 39). The sharp contrast of inside and outside further embodies how fortunate I am to be inside with my family, feeling warmth, care, and love, rather than spending Christmas alone in a foreign land that I do not call home.

I do not have the at-homeness feeling often in the U.S. One summer, my roommate’s family came from China for her graduation, and they stayed with us. One

day, when I came back from school, I heard a familiar question, “Have you eaten?” I froze at the door for a second with the key still in the door. Then I said honestly, “not yet.” “Then wash your hands and join us.” I was compelled to say yes to them, as their greeting/question reminded me of home, and I wanted to be myself when at home. I ask myself: how magical is it to feel at home simply by hearing a not frequently heard greeting with which one is familiar? Should we provide an honest answer to the greeting as a question? How does one feel encountering another way of greeting? Can we still feel at home?

The Americanized Greeting: “How Are You?”

I grew up with the greeting “Have you eaten?” which is asked regardless of the time we meet during the day. But after I came to the U.S, I abandoned that greeting; instead I learned to ask, “How are you?” the American way. I seldom use the expression “Have you eaten?” I do not ask my American or international friends whether they have eaten because they do not have the cultural understanding of what I am talking about; nor do I ask my Chinese friends in the U.S. because “I am already Americanized” per my mother’s words. Among Chinese students, we simply ask each other “最近怎么样?” “*Zui jin zenmo yang?*” “How have you been recently?” which is similar to “How are you?” I am so used to the American way of greeting and take it for granted. While picking up the words “How are you?” have I also internalized the way Americans act and think? Have I changed who I am? Have I ever had a second thought about why I ask, “How are you?”

One time my Chinese friend Jared and I went to an Indian restaurant. I said hi to the waiters because they all know me from my frequent presence there, and I naturally asked them, “How are you?” After we sat down at the table, Jared told me, “You are

more and more like Americans, so hypocritical!” I was shocked at that moment and reacted, “What? Why am I hypocritical? And what has that to do with being more American?” He said, “You asked them, ‘How are you?’ but do you really care how they are? Do you really think that Americans care how people are doing, how I am doing?” He continued without pausing or giving me a minute to jump in:

I hate people asking me ‘how are you?’ because it does not mean anything, we are just so used to answering them ‘I am good’, and that’s why I hate it. Even when you are miserable, you cannot tell them that.

I asked him, “Why not, just tell them that you are miserable.” He shook his head, “Because that’s not the expected answer.” Right then, at that particular moment, I started to think: maybe Jared is right. “How are you?” is so ritualized that we do not pause to think what its real meaning is, and we consider it a task that has to be finished, so we make a response that is brief, quick, and efficient. The superficial way that the question is asked does not mean that the person who asks genuinely cares how one is doing. That leads to Jared’s viewpoint of being hypocritical by asking, “How are you?”

Hypocrisy, from Old French *ypocrisie*, from ecclesiastical Latin *hypocrisis*, from Greek, *hypokrisis*, means “the acting of a part on the stage, feigning, and to pretend” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). If it is a stage performance, we are only playing our part, although emotions might be required to make it real. It might be moving and reverberating when we are on stage; however, real life is not role-playing. The authenticity and genuine interaction differentiate real life from a play.

Cameron (2002) in *The Nursing “How are you?”* states, “‘How are you?’ is an odd linguistic predicament. On the one hand, it is a question and yet on the other it is a greeting alone” (p. 11). The asking of “How are you?” yet anticipating an answer is not

considered abnormal, nor is the indifference to a person's response to that question. We might comment, "That's good" to a person who states that s/he is not doing so well, just like the hair dresser did to the customer who said that she was "not doing so good" in Cameron's writing. Having been used to people's indifference to "how" indeed we are actually doing, we respond with the anticipated answer "fine, good, or well," even in the case that we are not "fine." The greeting/question of "How are you?" is becoming so ritualized that it almost means nothing to us.

How, from Old High German *hwô*, is an adverbial formation from the interrogative pronoun stem *hwa-* who (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Therefore, etymologically, "how" is highly associated with "who". So if we do not even bother to listen to the "how," do we seriously and genuinely care about the "who" that is answering the question? No wonder my larger number of international students including Jared, perceive it the same way. What does a greeting mean? How do people greet one another authentically across cultures? Why don't we start to do what Cameron suggests: "to have desire, perception, insight, sincerity, feeling, caring, understanding, and concern when we ask 'How are you?'" (p. 18)

The Playing of English Language

English was one of my majors in college. For all the language training that I had received, which other Chinese students might not have had, I expected that language would not be a problem for me, even when it was my first time to be abroad. However, when I first arrived, I was afraid to open my mouth to reveal my accent; I was worried that I had to use a lengthy sentence to express myself while Americans can have a concise expression. I was concerned that I would be misunderstood. I strongly disliked the word "pardon?" both hearing and saying it. As every time it happens, it is an

unpleasant experience and a reminder that I am not an English native speaker. Hearing the word “pardon?” tells me that the listener could not understand me because of my wrong pronunciation or strong accent; saying it indicates my limited English capability to understand my conversant. Nevertheless, not saying, “pardon?” might lead to an awkward situation or even quite opposite understandings. I often overheard conversations like this: “How is everything?” “Awesome,” and then the two parties happily departed with no further probing. I was confused. How can they simply walk away as if nothing happened? Doesn’t “awe” mean fear, fright or something? I was intrigued and confused by similar conversations many times when I first came to the U.S, until one day I could no longer help myself and asked a friend. The friend burst into laughter, acting like that was the funniest thing he had ever heard, explaining that it only means something is fantastic or wonderful.

Vargas (2011), a Filipino journalist living in the U.S, also an undocumented immigrant, encountered a similar situation. When he first encountered the question “What’s up?” his response “the sky,” led to the kids’ laughter in school. Language is one of the first challenges for many people who first come to a different country. It takes time and effort to overcome this challenge. This overcoming process is not an easy one, with its funny, hilarious, and even embarrassing moments.

I recall my first and only time that I took a train in the U.S; it was an unforgettable experience. Besides the fact that my Japanese friend and I were stuck in Albany, New York, due to flooding, we almost got off at the wrong train station, which might have caused us to miss our transit train from New York City to Montreal, Canada. We literally heard “New York” on the speaker, and we packed our luggage in a timely

manner and were ready to run off. We got down on the platform, surprised to find that there was almost no one else on the platform but us, and to realize how small the station was, compared to our anticipation of the biggest transit station in the nation--Penn Station. "There should be a lot of people in NYC, and it should be much bigger!" "Maybe it is too early; it is only six o'clock in the morning!" We talked to each other. So we asked the staff standing on the platform "Is this New York?" "Yeah, it is Newark!" She responded far away. Having received the confirmation, both of us thought that we were at the right place for our next train, although it looked nothing like we imagined. Still, not completely sure, we double checked, "Is this where we get off for switching trains?" "Where are you going?" "Montreal." "Then you are going to New York, get back to the train NOW! The train is leaving now!" Confused, puzzled, and scared, we jumped back on the train immediately. A staff member clarified for us, "The stop you got off was Newark, not New York." While being grateful that we were not going to miss our transit train, we were still confused, because the two words sounded exactly the same to us: Newark and New York. To my Japanese friend and me, there would be no means that "W" and "Y" would sound the same. We two made a joke out of it, saying that we did not speak English. The pure pronunciation of words can create dramatic moments in our lives, simply because we are not native speakers. It is frustrating based on the fact that I started learning English when I was thirteen, majored in English in College, and had lived in the U.S. for five years when this incident took place. Still I could differentiate Newark and New York? What does it take to learn a language? Facing the difficulty of accurately pronouncing certain words among many others, might it be hard for Chinese international students to grasp the nuances both in language and culture?

Three years ago, I submitted a paper on international students' experience to a conference, about which one of the themes was the language barrier, and the reviewer wrote me back, "I am so surprised that they have language problems. Did they not take and pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)?" I was speechless when I saw the comment. Yes, indeed, most of them were able to pass the English proficiency test, such as TOEFL, but to pass the test does not necessarily mean that they can maneuver the language as native speakers do. Proficiency in a test does not mean proficiency in the actual application of a language. Studies have found that unsatisfactory performance such as understanding lectures, expressing ideas, and writing reports can be attributed to the lack of proficiency in English (Selvadurai, 1992). White and Brown found that poor English usage serves a major impediment to scholastic performance for international students (as cited in Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Although I majored in English as an undergrad, I still feel that my writing cannot be compared with those of my American peers. My language flaws, disadvantages and professors' constant critique on my academic writing often frustrate me, and weaken my self-confidence. The effect of the language barrier does not only reside in scholastic performance; the command of English also affects international students' social and overall satisfaction in the host country (Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

Moran (2000) interprets Gadamer on language: "Language can never be completely neutral, never a simple window on experience. Rather, language is already colored with the value system of the culture that supports it and which language in turn vivifies" (p. 270). Language is a reflection of culture, and language is cultural language. To command a language goes beyond learning how to pronounce, speak, read, and write;

one needs to have a better understanding of the cultural context to maneuver. Not knowing a greeting or understanding a joke, unaware of a TV show, a game or a toy in childhood, prevents a person's full participation in a conversation. It should not be attributed to a person's lack of language ability, but rather the cultural context, the cultural environment within which one grew up, and by which one was influenced. Even if one understands the linguistic meaning of a joke, one might not necessarily "get the point." What is funny for Americans is not necessarily funny for Chinese, and vice versa. What one is missing is the background, the cultural context.

When one does not "get the point," one feels left out, pushed to the edge of the conversation. No one wants to be the only one who is not laughing because of not understanding a joke, but eventually joins the laughing crew because everyone else is laughing. No one wants to be the one who does not even know the meaning of a greeting phrase but responds with something totally random. No one wants to be at the edge of a conversation. What does it mean to be at the edge? What can we do when we are at the edge? An edge is like a border or a point that you can be somewhere and also you cannot be somewhere; within the edge, you might be something, while beyond the edge, you might be something else. Within the edge, we might belong to a place or a group; however beyond the edge, we do not belong and we are excluded. O'Donohue (1999) writes, "When we are rejected or excluded, we become deeply wounded. To be forced out, to be pushed to the margin, hurts us" (p. 4). No one wants to be forced out or pushed to the margin. No one wants to get hurt. We all want to be part of the conversation. We all want to be in a community, where we can feel attention, love, and belonging. What does it mean to reside "in the margins" for international students?

A Person without Legs

Joline, an international student from China, shared that the one of her difficulties in the U.S. is the lack of transportation:

It made my life more, how to say, painful. Sometimes I don't feel like I can move around freely, and that limited me a lot, for example, in terms of daily living, as well as interacting with people, and from some pastime during the weekends or something else. First, minus a car, it limits your access to getting to grocery stores, also limits your social life, and your personal development. If I had a car, I might be able to go to a certain event, an exhibition, an air show, and I think concluding what I said, my life could have been much more colorful. That (not having a car) limits my opportunity to be fully immersed in the culture.

Joline spoke for me indeed. It was not until the sixth year of my stay in the U.S., did I obtain my driver's license and buy a car. I don't even remember how many times there had been that I wanted to go somewhere so that I could have fun or go to some friends' party when I was bored or lonely, but I could not, simply because it was difficult for me to get there without a car. A friend told me, "In America, not having a car and knowing how to drive is just like a person without legs." I thought it was an absurd exaggeration when I first heard it, but later I completely understood it, and in a hard way.

It was as if my freedom were deprived, not by anyone else, but by myself--my inability to drive. Even though there was public transportation that we could make use of to get from point A to point B, still it felt different from what I was used to: almost everywhere is accessible by public transportation. In the U.S. It is much more difficult for me to remember the roads, or even the direction that the bus is going. Simply the name change of roads and bus stops from Chinese to English seemed to be a tremendous change and made it significantly harder to memorize. I often felt insecure on the bus if it was my first time to ride, or if my destination was not the final destination, concerned that I might get lost. Even after I had taken the bus a few times, I still had to concentrate

and check the stops' names constantly. In order not to miss my stop, I was afraid to read a book or fall asleep on the bus; I was worried that I would not be able to find my way back afterwards if I missed the stop.

Besides utilizing public transportation, one option to get around is to be on one's feet and walk, when one does not have a car. I still vividly remember one of the very first few days after I arrived in Maryland, when I was not familiar with the surroundings in Maryland, how I walked to my part-time job interview:

It was so hot. It was around noontime, when the sun is the strongest of the day. I only walked for ten minutes. But it felt like an hour! Am I supposed to know if I am heading the right direction? Will I make it to the interview on time? If I ended up being late, should I even tell the director that I got lost and I walked here because I did not have a car? Would she even care? Why did I not wear sneakers today? It is such a torture to walk while the shoes are rubbing your feet! I wish I had scheduled the appointment earlier so that I did not have to go through this one hundred degree heat here in Maryland in late August, with the enveloping humidity. What is worse is that I did not see anyone on the road! The straight, endless, but empty road with nobody! That means no one to ask for directions or corrections of directions! Everyone is driving! I am the only one who is walking! I am not only walking, but also I am watched while walking! It is like I am a walking object, as Howard (2002) writes:

I have become his look-the object of his look. I began to watch myself as I imagine he must see me. It is as if I have moved outside myself, and am looking down on myself, watching like an out of body experience. (p. 54)

It was a weird and embarrassing feeling. It further revealed and reclaimed my difference: different from those who are driving, and different as a newcomer. (Personal Reflection, July 2011)

Another way to get around is to get rides from friends. However, I often felt very awkward, guilty, and indebted to my friends, because I did not want to bother them all the time from their busy schedule, although most of them did not mind. But I was grateful that I went to a school with proximity to Washington D.C, along with the fact that I lived about ten minutes away from a metro station, which made it much easier for me to

explore. But how about those Chinese international students who neither have a car nor live close to public transit? Does the restraint of their mobility influence how they experience the U.S? Are their lives less colorful as Joline described due to the lack of freedom, i.e. not having a vehicle? Are they frustrated, bored, and lonely? All the above drew me to study the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Chinese international graduate students in the United States.

The Phenomenological Path

As I mentioned earlier, I am an international student myself away from home, different from yet similar to other Chinese students. As I experience and reflect on my ups and downs as a foreign student in the U.S, I am also deeply interested in unpacking the phenomenon of the lived experiences of other Chinese international graduate students. In order to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon, to render the phenomenon as it is, I chose phenomenology as my methodology.

Van Manen (1990) cites Husserl, Schutz and Luckmann to give a general description of phenomenology: “Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld-- the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (p. 9). In order to present this lifeworld with minimum conceptualization, I followed van Manen's six research activities as my research guide, which I discussed and elaborated more in Chapter Three:

1. Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
 2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
 3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
 4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
 5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
 6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.
- (pp. 30-31)

Mapping of the Phenomenological Journey

In Chapter One, I revealed some bits of my own experience combined with some understandings found in my preliminary research that revealed the sense of home and belonging among Chinese students. I also explained what it feels like to be an outsider using "door" as a metaphor. My personal experience, expressions from students in my preliminary research, along with literature, poetry, and lyrics, made a good beginning into the phenomenon of being Chinese international students in the U.S.

In Chapter Two, I dive deep into the phenomenon and draw from literature and phenomenological research to further unpack the phenomenon from its multifacetedness: from trivial but taken-for-granted cultural differences, identity, re-identity, language, and loneliness. I used several metaphors, such as a mirror to reflect how Chinese students are reflected and how they want to be perceived. I also use the metaphor of bridge to describe the multi sources of bridges in our lives: such as language, technology, and even students themselves as bridges for communication and mutual understanding.

In Chapter Three, I describe my encounter with and employment of phenomenology as my methodology. I draw on Martin Heidegger, Hans-George Gadamer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Edward Casey, and other philosophers, for my philosophical groundings. I elaborate on how van Manen's (1990) six research activities guide my research on the lived experience of Chinese international students in the United States.

In Chapter Four, emergent themes from individual conversations with my participants unfold about their lived experiences in the United States. In the midst of strangeness and unfamiliarity, they find themselves straddling between two different worlds, both linguistically and culturally; while trying to "fit in" American society, they

find themselves “half and half” in negotiating their identities; while enjoying the space and freedom that the United States has to offer, they are anxious about the way of living in the U.S. and are concerned of losing their bearings. Their concern of day-to-day life, anxiety of their program completion, worrying about losing their Chineseness while not becoming “American” enough, and deep understanding of the intertwining between language and culture, guide me to perceive and interpret their lived experiences from a whole new level.

In the last chapter, Chapter Five, pedagogical implications are revealed from the themes in Chapter Four, which hopefully can direct us to different respects from which we can help to make the experiences of international students more self-oriented and meaningful.

**CHAPTER TWO:
WELCOME TO AMERICA!
UNPACKING THE PHENOMENON OF BEING A CHINESE INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATE STUDENT IN THE UNITED STATES**

Having turned to my phenomenon in Chapter One, I continued to unpack and reveal the lived experience of Chinese international students in the U.S. in Chapter Two, from its many facets: cultural differences, floating life style, identity negotiation, and loneliness. I used literature, quotes from my preliminary research, phenomenological sources, combined with my own experience, and also some metaphors to let the phenomenon show itself.

Different Cultural Practices

Coming to a different country means walking into a world full of differences. Some normal practices can be considered abnormal in a different culture, and a person who is experiencing it can be surprised, confused, or amazed. Those differences ought to be recognized rather than neglected, as they can serve as starting points for people of different cultural backgrounds to get to know and learn about one another.

Why Do They Ask Me and Why Do They Not Ask Me Again?

When Doi (1973) came to visit the U.S. for the first time from Japan, the host asked him whether he was hungry. He was, but, being Japanese, and feeling uncomfortable to say it to someone that he was not close to, he denied it, hoping that the host would ask again, as would a Japanese host. However, the host did not. "I found myself thinking that a Japanese would almost never ask a stranger unceremoniously if he was hungry, but would produce something to give him without asking" (p. 11). From Doi's perspective, he was thinking that if a person meant something, that person should directly do something without asking, just as Japanese people do. He was questioning the

genuineness of that asking: was it only asked out of politeness, or being ceremonious? If they did not mean it, why would they ask him in the first place? Doi was confused by the fact that wherever he went, many questions were asked of him: What kind of drink before dinner? Tea or coffee after dinner? With or without cream and sugar? He thought that if people really meant to offer him something to eat, they would continue to ask, or simply serve him without asking, just as Japanese do. Same act, but different interpretations. The common phrase to ask people whether they need something, indicative of the host's courtesy and hospitality in American culture, is interpreted as ceremonious and even negative from a Japanese perspective. Why does such a difference exist? What went wrong in this intercultural communication? On the other hand, if Doi complained about not being offered again, why did he not say "Yes" the first time? When not asked a second time, why did he not initiate asking for something? Why would a commonsensical phrase "Please help yourself," in American culture be interpreted negatively as "Nobody else would help you"? Doi interprets that the phrase "help yourself" indicates the host's inconsideration and insensitivity to leave the guest to "help him/herself" who is unfamiliar with the house (p. 13). Due to all the unfamiliarity and "awkwardness" of intercultural clash, Doi notes that his early days in America, which were already lonely, far away from home, were made even lonelier.

Similarly, when Liu (2001) first arrived in the U.S, he said, "No, thanks" to an offer of a drink, although he was very thirsty, expecting to be asked again. However, he was confused and surprised that the host served herself a drink and never asked him again. About half an hour later, when dinner was ready, Liu was offered some root beer, and he responded with a "Yes" immediately without quite having heard the word "root"

modifying “beer.” He did not quite like the beer, but to please his hostess, he kept drinking, pretending that he was enjoying it, which ended up that his empty glass was filled with the same drink again. Having realized that, he did not finish it a second time, fearing that the glass would be refilled again.

I responded in the same manner when I first arrived in the U.S: I would say “no” to an offering of a drink, a ride, a hand, due to the following reasons. First, I did not feel comfortable saying “yes” to strangers yet, and it is considered that someone did not have a good upbringing when saying “yes” to an offering the first time in China. Second, similar to Doi (1973), I assumed that if someone indeed meant something, that person should directly offer it instead of asking whether the person needs something. Last, but not least, I was subconsciously reminded of my family’s teaching that I should not lose face of my family outside. Saying “yes” to a first-time offering happens to be one of those losing face situations. A simple concept, face, is played out differently in different cultural contexts. During the encounter of different cultures, how do Chinese international students speak up for themselves while maintaining their cultural norms? Maybe one does not have to give up particular practices in order to adopt other practices? Maybe it can be a matter of broadening horizons rather than “fitting in”?

Saving/Losing Face

Face is an important concept in Chinese and Asian culture. Face, the closest counterpart in Chinese language is 脸面, *lian mian*; however, those two can be separate but interrelated concepts (Liu, 2001). *Lian* stands for “the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation,” while *mian* refers to prestige and reputation (Hu, 1944, p. 45). The concept of face goes beyond a person’s physical appearance, and it is more

about how individuals feel their character or behaviors are judged or perceived by others (Liu, 2001). Chinese people do things around the concept of “face,” either to gain *mianzi* (face) or to avoid losing face. Perhaps Liu (2001) and Doi (1973) are afraid of losing face as well when saying “No” to the first time offer? Because once someone “loses face” (丢脸), that person does not only lose face for him/herself, but also for his/her family, community, or even country. Maybe that is why many Chinese feel particularly embarrassed when meeting Americans. They are afraid that they might “lose face for their country” by unwittingly breaking conventions (Hu, 1994, p. 50).

In Liu’s (2001) study, quite a number of Asian students were concerned about their poor English speaking abilities and kept quiet in classroom participation in the American universities for two reasons: first, some wanted to save face for themselves and were afraid of making mistakes; second, some did not want to make their Asian fellows look incapable of participating in discussion and cause them to lose face by their own domination of classroom discussion. Jia (2001) notes, “The face practices lie at the heart of Chinese culture” (p. xi). The face concept is so entrenched in the culture that molded me, and I have naturally brought it with me to the U.S; however, it is a different scenario here. I was afraid to ask for something myself first, yet at the same time, I would wonder why did they not ask me again? In what manner does this sense of “face” precede the real face of Asian students of being introduced to U.S. culture? Do the meaning and importance of face fade as Chinese international graduate students stay in the U.S. longer?

Just as it is considered an unpleasant demeanor to accept a first-time offer, Chinese will always comment, “No, I am not that good” or “哪里哪里” “*nali nali*” to a

compliment, which literally means “just so so,” to demonstrate their humility. How do Americans perceive the way Chinese react while we perceive nothing abnormal in it?

Bond (1991) was intrigued by similar scenario:

A candidate for a job opening in our Department is giving a seminar, so we can learn about his research (and his teaching skills) at first hand. He begins by apologizing for not being adequately prepared. “It has been a very busy week and I have not had time to give my presentation proper attention. I do hope that you will overlook any shortcomings.” (p. v)

The above statement sounds strange to Americans and those who are not familiar with Chinese culture. Who would want to tell the interview committee that she or he did not give proper attention to something that one should have? If one did not, that is the person’s problem! But Chinese people do! They do it to be humble and to demonstrate that they have the capacity in a reverse and implicit way. Likewise, I often hear Chinese international students start their conversations or classroom participations by apologizing for their “bad English” or “limited English” just in case they make any mistakes to embarrass themselves or cause them to lose face. Is it simply a sentence to express their humility, or is it a sign to reveal their fear about the fact that they are newcomers, foreigners, and outsiders who speak the language as a second language?

How long does it take for the feeling of a newcomer and discomfort to fade away?

Bond (1991) says:

It is my fifteenth year in Hong Kong and I still feel like a newcomer, a foreigner surrounded by an ocean of Chinese. Surprises abound in my daily world and even the old stand-bys retain their capacity to amaze, delight, irritate, and perplex. (p. v)

How long does it take for a person to feel comfortable in a new environment? Simply based on the example of accepting or turning down a first time offer, how does one person judge what is appropriate or inappropriate? Tung (2002) tells the story about a

social worker from Beijing that she helped and who attempted to come to her house to express his gratitude with no appointment scheduled. Would Tung be annoyed and offended had he succeeded? Wouldn't it be rude to show up at someone's door unannounced? Why does Wu (1991) feel puzzled, disliked, even rejected when he gestured to a student to sit in an empty seat, having seen that the student was sitting on the floor because she came in late? Coming from a different culture, Wu thought that he was trying to be a good teacher: thoughtful, considerate, and caring for his student by offering her a seat, as he assumed it was uncomfortable and impolite to sit on the floor. However, the student was comfortable where she was. A teacher, an empty seat, a student sitting on floor—an interesting scenario. Both the teacher and the student might have felt offended from different perspectives had the student turned down a second time offer from Wu: he would have lost face since the student did not listen to him as a teacher, while she would think that he did not respect her will. The student-teacher relation is in a different dynamic. Two cultures are at play. How does a person straddle between cultures? How do Chinese international students succeed in classrooms?

A Floating Life

There is an expression in China nowadays called 北漂 *Bei Piao*, with its direct translation meaning “North floating,” referring to those who left their homes for Beijing to look for better career and life opportunities. The situation that someone is away from home for a living is called 背井离乡, *bei jing li xiang* in Chinese, meaning that you are away from your hometown and have your back towards the well that nurtured you with water. When you are 背井离乡, you are away from home and uprooted. It is a sad and nostalgic scenario. Berlin (2010) writes that the notion of rootedness actually means

having attachments, both personal and material within a defined geographic frame. When Frederick Douglass (as cited in Berlin, 2010) spoke about his local connections, he was referring to “the people--family and friends – as much as the landscape of a special piece of Maryland’s eastern shore” (p. 26). No one wants to be 背井离乡 and cut the attachments to that particular place in one’s heart. No one wants to be away from “a place where no matter what, I belong” as poet Nikki Giovanni writes (cited in Berlin, 2010, p. 27).

To leave one’s own country is to give up both the unfavorable and taken-for-granted familiarities and open up to differences (Li, 2002). Life invisibly becomes hard when a person is 北漂 (*bei piao*), floating; everything simple, easy, and trivial seems to be insurmountable. In order to survive and fit in, one has to learn to shoulder everything by oneself, learn to be independent, and learn to be strong, and stronger.

I often joke with my friends in China about my staying in the U.S., and I tell them that I am “北漂一族” *bei piao yi zu*, one of those who are floating in the North. In my context, the *North* is North America. My mother’s constant comment on my lifestyle further reinforces the idea that I am still floating, because I have not yet settled down and I am away from home, and rootless. I wonder whether other Chinese international students feel the same way? Do they feel they are constantly floating, and when will this floating end?

Float, means to, “move quietly and gently on the surface of a liquid, participating in its motion” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Whatever is floating is in a constant state of moving. Why do Chinese international students feel as if they are floating? What does it feel like to float? Is the state of movement an indication of freedom, not being restrained,

or is it a state of incapability or no intention to settle down? Think about when we are in water. Sometimes we float because we choose to, because we have our motion under control. But sometimes we float because we have to, because the current is too strong, because we are pushed all over the place, and not knowing where to go, and because we have to survive. I wonder what kind of floating style Chinese international students have? Is it because of choice or is it involuntary?

I am aware that quite a number of American people are trying to understand and acquaint themselves the lives of international students; however, I am not sure of the degree of that understanding. “To understand is to *stand under* (or *in*) another’s position in the world” (Lemert, 2005, p. 166). Gadamer (1975/2004) also writes that to understand is to “*transpose oneself* into another person’s situation” (p. 304). However, can people really try to situate themselves in a situation that they might never have been in, and to understand that person who is in a totally different situation?

A Struggle for Status

How can my American fellows understand the disappointment that a foreign student feels when excluded from scholarships or employment opportunities for American citizens only? The twenty-hour work limit regulated by immigration law and the lack of legal permission to work outside school, frustrate international students. A friend of mine who is a dancer and loves teaching dance, told me how frustrated and powerless she felt when the school which invited her to teach could not figure out a way to process her payment legally, simply due to her F-1 student status, which has a twenty-hour on campus work limit. I also encountered a similar situation: I wanted to do an unpaid internship in D.C. one semester; however, I could not, simply because I already had a twenty-hour job on campus. I was very frustrated. I started to feel my friend’s pain.

I could not understand why I could not accept the internship, even an unpaid one. Not until my own turn did I understand how frustrating it could be to be excluded from those valuable opportunities. Dilthey (1976) says that we cannot recognize in another person a feeling that we have not experienced ourselves. The experience of being turned away, excluded, and rejected simply due to citizenship status has not been lived by my American fellows in this country, and it is hard for them to recognize, let alone to understand. Even if they try to understand, how much can they?

The Threat of Return

Does the work situation get better for Chinese international students upon graduation, when they will no longer be holding the foreign student statuses? Not necessarily. The scenario could be even worse: they may be at risk of having to go back home if a job is not secured, even though some of them might have the intention to stay in the U.S. for a longer period of time. However, finding a job in the U.S. is rather complicated: it is not only a matter of one's talent and ability; rather, it is an immigration issue and whether the employer is capable or willing to sponsor that person on a work visa. Those issues combined together compose the main personal concerns for Chinese international students: visa issues, job opportunities and immigration concerns (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Therefore, the question to those students with the intention to stay in the U.S. might become: Why don't they find a job that can sponsor them a visa to stay? It is easier to ask this question, however; to answer it is not that easy, and the key point is to find an employer who is willing to do so. A person who is not in a similar situation cannot have the capacity to digest how certain situations work, especially when it comes to immigration.

People would automatically ask Vargas (2012) why he did not choose to become

legal having realized that he is an undocumented immigrant. When he responded that there is no way or process for him to become legal, some people continued with the question whether he could get a green card. Vargas considered those questions exasperating, as people who asked those questions had no knowledge about immigration, let alone to connect “the piece of paper” that gives undocumented people permission to work and their daily lives together. Certainly there is a major difference between international students and undocumented immigrants: the former have the F-1 student visa for them to stay legally, while the latter have nothing. But they share similar pain and stories that are difficult for people who are not in those situations to comprehend.

Life of a foreign student, not only Chinese international students, is a rootless one, as the person is floating all the time, without knowing where a root might be planted or extended, or even the possibility to do so. It is more than a kind of life away from family and support; it is a life full of anxiety, even to a degree that someone might have felt that she or he has lost confidence, and cannot find her or his own value, and has lost oneself. Faye, a Chinese female student, who was pursuing a Master’s degree in finance in the U.S, told me that she saw no hope securing employment upon graduation, after many failures of getting an internship. She said that it seemed that all employers were scared and ran away immediately after she mentioned that she would need sponsorship for her work visa. She shared with me her concern and anxiety:

What if I cannot find a job here? I start to question myself. I used to think that as long as I work hard, I can achieve what I wanted, just like what I did in China. I thought I came to a country filled with wonderful opportunities as long as I work hard. But now, I do not see it. I have no confidence anymore. I feel that no employer wants to hire me, and I am so worried, what should I do? If I go back to China, what can I do? I do not know who I am or what I can do anymore.

I did not know what to share with or tell her, as I did not have the answers to her

questions, but only to encourage her to keep trying and working hard. What has changed inside of her? Where is the confident girl that she used to be? How does she negotiate between the two different selves now? How is it possible that she no longer knows who she is? The majority of the international population, students, immigrants, certainly including myself, had some assumptions and fantasies about the U.S., many of which came from the social media prior to our first-hand experiences. When the reality did not quite meet our expectations, we started to question the imagined perfect world full of “opportunities” for which we had longed. In the midst of imagination, expectation, fantasy, reality, and even disappointment for some, how do Chinese international students manage to straddle between cultures and maintain their identities? And what does it mean to have identities?

The Meaning of Identity

“Identity is people’s source of meaning and experience” (Castells, 2010, p. 6). To be a person means to have some sort of identity, be it given or obtained. People talk about identity all the time, although oftentimes they might not be referring to the same thing. Without identity, we are not human beings and there is no one who does not have identity (ies), as Calhoun (1994) states, “We know of no people without names, no languages, or cultures in which some manner of distinctions between self and other, we and they are not made” (p. 9). Each of us is different, hence our identities. Castells asserts that identities should be differentiated from what sociologists call “roles,” such as a mother, a neighbor, a churchgoer, a smoker, and so on, at the same time. He contends that identities mean much more than roles because identities carry stronger meanings as they are self-constructing in the process of individualization: “Identities organize meaning, while roles organize the functions” (p. 7). Castells defines *meaning* as “the symbolic identification by

a social actor of the purpose of her/his action” (p. 7). The following section explores the plurality and meaning of identities of Chinese international students.

A Given Name—An Assigned Identity/A Changing Name—A Rite of Passage

Families spend a long time trying to come up with names to name a child even before the child is born, and that name becomes one of many identities for that child. It is always someone else who gives us an identity, for instance, parents, teachers, or members of the community (Rosensweig, 1954). Strauss (1997) indicates that a name is a container, into which the conscious and unwitting evaluations of the namer have been poured. The names somehow demonstrate the namers’ intention of who they want us to be like, based on the meaning of the names. Usually newborn children have no clue whether they like the name or not. We subconsciously accept the names, and more importantly, the names become one of our received identities, yet a unique one, and most of us carry it lifelong. However, later on, as we grow, people change their names both voluntarily and involuntarily.

Strauss (1997) notes, “The changing of names marks a rite of passage” (p. 18). It means that people change names due to their perceptions of the mismatch between the name and self-image, as they want to have a name that can best present who s/he wants to be, rather than being the kind of person that the previous name had signified. Artists, musicians, and movie stars change their names to fit an image they desire. Women change their names in marriage. However, some people change their names because they want to fit in or feel compelled to do so. I mentioned in Chapter One that some Chinese students give themselves English names, and I briefly questioned what it means to have this seemingly simple change of name.

Eva Hoffman (1989) had an original name, Ewa. Her name was changed when

she first emigrated with her parents and younger sister, Alina, from Poland to Canada. Changing names was one of the first adaptation strategies for the family, when they first arrived in Vancouver: Ewa became Eva, and Alina became Elaine. Is it just a name change? “The seemingly minor change of names was received by both me and my sister as a profound alienation of personal identity, a small, seismic mental shift” (p. 3). What does this Americanized name intend and stand for? What happens to the person formerly known as Ewa once she becomes Eva? Ritivoi (2002) comments on the name change of Eva Hoffman: “The Americanized name is obviously intended to de-estrangle her, by making her a part of the new environment through a renewed, symbolic baptism” (p. 155). But the question is: did Ewa feel part of the new environment by becoming Eva? Does the simple change of name automatically mean that person fits into and belongs to that environment? What is wrong with the original name Ewa? What is wrong with any “foreign” name? Is a name part of who we are? Why do we need to change it to cover up who we are? Ritivoi notes:

The name change is also intended as a cover: its purpose is to protect and to allow them to withdraw in their privacy, to no longer have to exhibit themselves to the others’ gaze. A foreign name beckons explanations, life stories that reconnect one to the place of origin. The new name, on the other hand, is a disguise before it can truly stand for a new identity. (p. 157)

Many immigrants and international students adopt the same strategy by changing their names into American names, and Chinese international students are no exception. Their intention is to avoid trouble and protect themselves, being no longer under another’s gaze.

A name, an identity. A new name, a new identity. However, does this new name indeed mean a new identity? Will that person with the new name feel comfortable with

that new identity? What happens to those male and female students from China who changed their names to Paul, George, Mary, or Stephanie? How does it feel to live under a name that originally is not one's own? Where does this naming difference lead?

Identity: Sameness and Difference

When strangers meet, one of the most frequently asked questions is, "Where are you from?" after acquiring one another's names. The effort to locate one another into a specific region along with other information is actually a process to identify others and to be identified oneself. There are many ways to identify people: besides specific location, we usually try to identify a person by gender, language, religion, ethnic background, profession and even sexual orientation, etc.

But what is identity? Etymologically speaking, there are two terms that stand for the meaning of identity in Latin, *idem* and *ipse*, which interestingly are not perfect synonyms: sameness and difference. The former signifies identity as something permanent in time, while the latter tolerates change, degrees, and variation, and thus, includes difference and oneness (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2011, & Ritivoi, 2002). Therefore, the two dynamic principles, sameness and difference, constitute the concept of identity, which makes it necessary to discuss "to identify" when speaking of "identity," as one important aspect of "identity" is its temporality (Ritivoi, 2002, p. 43). Regardless of identifying or being identified, it is a process of seeking sameness/similarity and differences between us, and trying to connect or disconnect with that person. Sameness and difference have an interesting complimentary and dialectic relation.

To speak of sameness/similarity and difference is a matter of emphasis, because similarity cannot be recognized without delineating difference (Jenkins, 1996). People find sameness in order to create a sense of membership, and the process is also actually

one to create a boundary, everything beyond which one does not belong. When we talk about inclusion, it also entails exclusion by default. Jenkins continues to elaborate on the relationship between sameness and difference:

One of the things *we* have in common is our difference from others. In the face of their difference our similarity often comes into focus. Defining ‘us’ involves defining a range of ‘thems’ also. When we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves. In social terms, similarity and difference are always functions of a point of view: our similarity is their difference and vice versa. Similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary. (pp. 80-81)

The many “samenesses and differences” that we find in a person or a group of people become one of the many criteria that we use to define ourselves. Some are easier and more noticeable to find, while others are more hidden and profound. They help us to recognize ourselves and others, and find where we belong. To find sameness with certain people means to find differences with others and our distinctness from them. Our identities are always relational, meaning that we always presuppose a difference between ourselves and those “who are not us” (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007, p. 7). However, in the midst of sameness and difference, is identity more about sameness or difference? As Ritivoi (2002) asks, “How does personal identity unfold in this contentious domain of sameness and difference” (p. 44)? Is this kind of sameness and difference applicable both interpersonally and intrapersonally as well? Aren’t we oftentimes the same and different simultaneously in different contexts, in time and over time? How do Chinese international students deal with sameness and difference in daily lives?

Identities are not neutral (Week, 1990). By saying who we are, we are actually also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. Even after we express what we are, what we believe and desire, what is the real meaning of making

such expressions? Week contends that identity is about belonging. By identifying ourselves, we long to claim where we do and do not belong. In this sense, do Chinese students find their sameness and difference in others? How do they view that sameness and difference? How do they find their belonging?

A Changing Identity

Tabouret-Keller (1997) in *Language and Identity* notices:

At any given time a person's identity is a heterogeneous set made up of all the names or identities, given to and taken up by her. But in a lifelong process, identity is endlessly created anew, according to very various social constraints (historical, institutional, economic, etc.), social interactions, encounters, and wishes that may happen to be very subjective and unique. (p. 316)

We all have a plurality of identities, among which we try to balance the relationship between one another. Some identities are given while some are taken. In the meanwhile, we assign and take identities. When we assign identities to certain groups of people or individuals, it is hard not to associate them with stereotypes. *Stereotype*, from French *stereotype*, means "printing by means of a solid plate of type," later means "image perpetuated without change," and "preconceived and oversimplified notion of characteristics typical of a person or group". In our daily lives, we apply this oversimplified notion quite often, which is guided by our imperfect knowledge or no knowledge at all. For instance, in Meierkord's (2007) study on international students' national identities, some participants automatically assigned an African prince identity to a person who was from Cameroon or someone who was given several wives. A person who was from Spain was identified as a flamenco dancer. Phenomena as such take place daily around us, and I should not be surprised to see such stereotyped associations taking place. I myself associate stereotypes with certain groups of people, and give them justifiable names and identities, hence defining those people to whom I assign those

identities. While complaining about the unfairness of people categorizing me, I subconsciously am acting the same: putting people into certain groups, and assigning people to some identities that they did not choose. Who gets to identify a person? Do assigned identities accurately reflect what a person is? Once an identity is constructed, can it be deconstructed and reconstructed?

The concept of identity is a dynamic one rather than being static, based on the interactions and encounters of many factors, in which change is involved. Hall (1990) shares similar ideas on the dynamic nature of identity, and states that identity is rather identification and a gradually producing process:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (p. 222)

The fluid nature of identity manifests more explicitly, for those who embark on movement or cross borders such as immigrants, refugees, and international students. As the environment changes, how they identify themselves might change consequently as well. Different environments pave many possibilities and opportunities for what a person might become. Identities are in a constant state of shaping and reshaping. But what are the forces that shape and reshape one’s identity? Mercer (1990) says that identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis or when people are experiencing doubt and uncertainties of who they are. I wonder whether Faye (one participant in my preliminary research as mentioned earlier) is the only one who is experiencing identity crisis? Are other Chinese international graduate students also experiencing identity crisis? Do they identify themselves based on who they think they are, or based on who others think they

are?

Identity: Presented to or Perceived by?

Identity, from middle French *identité*, means quality or condition of being the same; individuality, personality, distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Strauss (1997) contends that no matter what kind of identity we are referring to, it is connected with the appraisals made of oneself—by oneself and by others. We all present ourselves to others and to ourselves, and see ourselves in the mirrors of their judgment. Strauss states that the experience of seeing and being seen is “a little like the experience of the small boy first seeing himself (at rest and posing) in the multiple mirrors at the barber shop or in the tailor’s triple mirrors” (p. 11). Nevertheless, the question is: Are the mirrors accurately reflecting who we are? Is what we see in the mirror our true identity? Calhoun (1994) says that identity turns on the interrelatedness between two recognitions or nonrecognitions: self recognition and recognition by others, as he writes: “Recognition is vital to any reflexivity, for example, any capacity to look at oneself, to choose one’s actions and see their consequences, and to hope to make oneself something more or better than one is” (p. 20). For almost everyone, the tension is which recognition should we emphasize more? Is it even possible to give both an even amount of attention? Would a person lose him/herself if caring too much about the recognition of others?

In order to appraise her own beauty, the wicked stepmother of Snow White asks the mirror, “Who is the most beautiful woman in the world?” constantly. Tung (2000) writes that the stepmother is actually getting a sense of herself based on the feedback of the mirror. Tung uses the mirror to explain how we see ourselves, and she recognizes that we see ourselves as others see us, just like what we see in a mirror. Tung indicates that

we encounter numerous mirrors in our life course, and some of them are clear and accurate, while some are distorted to flatter or ridicule; some are well-framed and in one piece, while some are cracked or missing pieces. Not necessarily all that we see in the mirror is accurate, appropriately reflecting who we are. Many things in life can serve as mirrors. Li Shiming, an emperor in the Tang Dynasty in Chinese history, commented the following when his good subjugate/advisor, Wei Zheng, passed away:

Using bronze as mirror, one can adjust his clothing; using history as mirror, one can know historical and social changes; using people as mirror, one can see his own accomplishment and loss. Now Wei Zheng is gone, I lost a mirror as well! (Liu, 1975, p. 98)

Surrounded by people from various cultural backgrounds, Chinese international students see themselves in the people who interact with on a daily basis. Those people serve as mirrors to one another. But I wonder whether how we see ourselves in them accurately reflects who we are? Are we trying to act differently from who we are, to get a better image in the mirror? Are Chinese students trying to act in a way so that they can be better perceived, so that they can better represent their family, community, and even country, to gain some face?

Identity and Nostalgia

International students are foreigners. Foreigners are outsiders. Agnew (2005) writes that being an outsider can make the individual alienated and heighten the feeling of sadness, and nostalgia. But does nostalgia have to do with our identities, and who we are as individuals? Davis (1979) writes in *Yearning for Yesterday*, “Nostalgia is one of the means—or, better, one of the more accessible psychological lenses that we employ in the never-ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities” (p. 31). *Nostalgia* comes from the Greek word *nostos*, meaning “return home,” and *algia*,

meaning pain or longing. Hence, nostalgia literally means a painful yearning to return home, or “homesickness” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2011; Davis, 1979; Ritivoi, 2002; & Wilson, 2005). Originally, nostalgia referred to a medical condition, the cause of which is the constant fantasies about home, which gradually occupied the patients’ minds, to a point that they could simply not entertain any other thoughts (Ritivoi, 2002). Those patients were obsessed with their homes and their imaginations of homes and past, to a degree that they were even fantasizing a “delightful and enchanting” home, even though the actual home might be totally “rude and barren” (Ritivoi, 2002, p. 17). Why are people so obsessed with their past, even it is not as pretty as they thought, memorized, or even imagined?

Davis (1979) elaborates on the metaphor of nostalgia being a lens:

Nostalgia can be thought of as a kind of telephoto lens on life which, while magnifies and prettifies some segments of our past, simultaneously blurs and grays other segments, typically those closer to us in time. (p. 31)

When we experience nostalgia, the focus has been shifted from the current moment to the past. Are we as international students nostalgic, longing for the past, because we cannot obtain something that we had in the past in the current time and locale? Or are we trying to continue who we were yesterday, looking for a sense of continuity, while avoiding the discontinuity? Davis writes that nostalgia keeps the accent, if not the verisimilitude of the past. Nostalgia juxtaposes the past and the present, and can even possibly influence what next step should be taken for a person in the future.

Oftentimes, during my conversations with other Chinese students, one of the topics is what or who we would be, had we stayed in China and never left. The “what if” question is heavily involved. However, once a “what if” is involved in a situation, that

means a high probability that something is not going to happen, and it simply is a hypothesis, or imagined thought. We are imagining what life would be and who we would have become had we never left. In a sense, we are living in the present, and in another, we live in the past.

Eva Hoffman did the same thing: she kept narrating to the reader and more importantly to herself about two stories: one about how her life is unfolding in different aspects in American life, and the other is a hypothetical story, following her life in Poland: how she would have matured into a woman, chosen a career, married and so on (Hoffman, 1989). Her identity is defined by neither of the two narratives, but by a triangular mechanism that connects the double, who she could have been had she never left Poland, to whom she is at present in America, and finally to a third element, who she might be in the future (Ritivoi, 2002). Hoffman's nostalgia brings her to live both in the present and in the past, which have been tearing her apart, as they have opposite directions and trajectories for her to follow. She cannot follow either of them: "Purely to the present narrative is unfaithful to what had shaped her in the past, while only hypothesizing that she lived in the past without waking up amounts to an effectual suicide" (Ritivoi, 2002, p. 159). What does Hoffman need to do to negotiate between the two narratives? What should Chinese international students do given that they are in a similar scenario? What does it feel like to be torn apart between the present and the past, the reality and the imagined world?

Borderland—Identity Negotiation

Anzaldúa (1999) asserts in *Borderlands: La Frontera*, that there are other kinds of borderlands besides the physical borderland we usually reside in, and in her case the Texas-U.S., Southwest/Mexican border. Those borderlands include psychological,

sexual, spiritual ones, among many others. She writes:

In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (Preface, 1999, p. i)

I, along with many other Chinese international students, live in many borderlands too, both physically and metaphorically. What does it mean to live in borderlands? Anzaldúa says that to live in or have more than one culture, one receives multiple and even opposing messages, which is when those cultures encounter, interact, and even collide with one another. And how do we survive in this borderland?

Chinese international students including myself are border-crossers. Not only have we crossed the visible geographic border, but also we have crossed many other invisible ones. Zhang (2008) notes that the real beginning of border-crossing experiences starts with those invisible ones, such as space, time, race, culture, language and history, etc. What counts as a successful border crossing? What does it mean to straddle between cultures? Will a person be split? Hall (1976) writes that most cross-cultural exploration begins with the experience of being lost. It is OK to be lost. However, the question is: can we find our way back? Or is there even a way back? *Explore*, from Latin *explōrā-re* to search out, is composed of *ex*, (meaning out) + *plōrāre* (meaning to make to flow), altogether meaning to “investigate, seek to ascertain or find out (a fact, the condition of anything)” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). We investigate when we do not know or are not sure about something. It is a discovering and learning experience. Some investigations are shorter, while some are longer.

Exploring is also a negotiation process, concerning time, space, language, identity, value, relation, etc. In order to negotiate, a person needs to know oneself and

with whom one is negotiating. In negotiation, some party has to compromise.

Compromise, which is from Latin *compromissus*, is composed of *com* and *promittere* (*pro* + *mittere*). *Pro* means before, and *mittere* means to put, send (mission). Promise means “declaration made about the future, about some act to be done or not done”.

Compromise means that this declaration or decision is made together among different parties. But I wonder during this negotiation whether such togetherness exists? Or is it simply a solo? Is it a self-negotiation or a negotiation with others? Do Chinese international students have the right tools with which to negotiate?

Mother Tongue and Second Language

Anzaldúa (1999) says: “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (p. 81). It is very true. Usually how we differentiate a person from many others is by the language that they speak, besides the most obvious physical traits that each of us has. That is: we are the languages we speak. Delpit (2002) also contends that our identity is intimately connected to our first language:

Just as our skin provides a means for us to negotiate our interactions with the world—how we perceive the surroundings and how we are perceived, language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin That We Speak*. (p. xvii)

When a person first arrives in a new place, that person has to know the language to be able to communicate with the locals. People initiate conversations in order to be somewhat understood. However, can a conversation start or continue if the parties who are in the conversation do not speak the same language? Can understanding be achieved then? Gadamer (1975/2004) writes, “Mastering the language is a necessary precondition for coming to an understanding in a conversation” (p. 387). In order to be understood, we need to master the language first. Language is the foundation and way to understanding.

Gadamer says that to have a conversation the two partners first need to find a common language. English is the most commonly used language in the U.S., and by default, it becomes the common language, which also means that whoever does not speak the language needs to learn it as a new language, a second or a third language, as English is for almost all Chinese international students. How do those students balance the relationship between the second language and their mother tongue? When switching between two languages, what does each language mean?

Mother tongue indicates a language of community—a language of sharing, a language of familiarity, a vernacular language of daily conversation, a language with a profound respect of the other as self (Aoki, 1987/1991). If the mother tongue makes us at home with comfort and familiarity, does it also simultaneously make us virtual strangers in others' life worlds (Aoki, 1987/1991)? Will the second language always maintain its secondness? Is it possible that one day this second language will replace the mother tongue after a person speaks the second language long enough or with proficiency? Is it purely a matter of speaking when speaking the second language?

Aoki (1987/1991) says, "Coming to know a second language is indeed a coming to know a way to enter a new world" (p. 239). With this language, we can explore and negotiate in the new world, while without it, life can be quite a struggle for someone, or one might not be able to achieve who one aspires to be. Language is essential for survival in the new world. "Language is the house of Being. In its home man [sic] dwells" (Heidegger, 2008c, p. 217). I wonder whether a person dwells in the second language that she or he speaks? Does that person belong to both worlds? Aoki writes, "Being bilingual is to belong to two worlds at once and yet not belong to either completely" (p. 243). If

Chinese international students do not belong to either, where do they belong? Where is the dwelling of their Being? Are they homeless in a sense?

Flower of the Mouth

Heidegger (1971) contends, “Language is the flower of the mouth” (p. 99).

Usually the first association made with a flower is its beauty. In my preliminary research, one student, Angela, also used a similar metaphor to tell me about her language issues.

She used the verse 锦上添花, *jin shang tian hua*, which means to embroider a flower on the silk, the Chinese traditional embroidery, which is considered beautiful. She used the phrase to explain to me that she cannot truly unfold the beauty of the English language, as she felt that she did not possess the capacity to do so, even though she received significant English training and considered herself quite good at using the language.

I wonder if other Chinese students feel the same way? What about those whose English are not as good as Angela’s? It is not uncommon to notice the word “beautiful” to modify a language. We often hear the statement, “XXX is a beautiful language.” When we say that some language is beautiful, to what exactly are we referring? Is it the sound of the language, or is it because of the language that we get to understand and be understood? What do we need to notice and further bring forth to see the beauty of a language?

Regarding the daily use of a language, there are three common forms that each of us has to encounter: listening, speaking, and writing, all of which are significantly interconnected. Some Chinese international students avoid speaking the English language by not actively participating in classrooms or social life with local Americans as I experience and observe; still, they cannot be excused from the listening and writing

aspects of English language use: understanding lectures or class content, or finishing writing assignments, be it weekly, mid-term assignments or even a thesis or dissertation. Ryan (2005) writes that international students feel that they have lost themselves or their personalities due to the fact that the language (English) cannot express the sophistication of their thoughts. If they cannot express themselves and be understood, can they still unfold the beauty of the language, “the flower of the mouth” to facilitate communication and understanding?

Bridging Bridges

A bridge is “a structure forming or carrying a road over a river or a ravine, or affording passage between two points at a height above the ground” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Thanks to a bridge, two sides start to become connected. Does the bridge only serve as a connector between places? What indeed is a bridge? Aoki (1991) notes:

In our everyday activities, we walk over bridges, drive over bridges, and build bridges. If we pause to ask what a bridge is, some will wonder what there is to ask. The answer seems too obvious. A bridge is a bridge! Why ask about what we already know? (p. 437)

Do we indeed know what a bridge is? Maybe we have seen too many bridges in our lives, and have been used to the existence of bridges, such as a small one over a local creek while we walk in the park, or a big bay bridge that we drive on. Bridges can be small or big, but in all, we have adopted the idea that a bridge is there to serve us, and rarely do we think about the meaning of a bridge, even when we are physically on the bridge. Aoki says, “We are accustomed to think that bridges link lands. Bridges allow us to cross from bank to bank, from one land to another, and even cross the wide Pacific” (p. 437).

Heidegger (2008a) contends that a true bridge is never a mere bridge or a symbol; rather, it is a thing that gathers the fourfold of the world: the sky, the earth, mortals, and the Divine. Aoki (1991/2005) shares a similar comment:

Any true bridge is more than a merely physical bridge. It is a clearing—a site—into which earth, sky, mortals, and divinities are admitted. Indeed, it is a dwelling place for humans who, in their longing to be together, belong together. (p. 438)

A bridge brings people together, and there can be many forms functioning as a bridge in our lives.

Language as Bridge

Unlike thought, language cannot presume to be the “essence” of the world, and instead there is only one thing that language can be: It must be a bridge between the world and these other things. And that is precisely what it is. (Rosensweig, 1953, p. 59)

Indeed it is a bridge, since we cross over it to get to the other communication end in order to get our points across. No matter what language it is, it serves as a bridge, even sometimes if the two ends do not speak the same language, which makes it even more necessary and essential to build this bridge, that is, to find a common language (Gadamer, 1975/2004). Without this common language, a conversation cannot be started or sustained, let alone the meaning and essence of the conversation determined. Hence, a bridge cannot be, and the connection seems extremely challenging or even impossible. Body language, indeed, helps, but, the intention, meaning, and essence of the communication end cannot be conveyed without a bridge. That is why language is extremely important not only with people who speak the same language, but also with those with whom we originally do not speak the same language. Language as a bridge brings us all together. The challenge for international Chinese international students is to discover that bridge.

Technology as Bridge

Migration has become one of the most common phenomena in the modern world (Castells, 2010). In the midst of busy lives and relocations, it is necessary that people stay in touch with the places where they are originally from, either to preserve their cultural or ethnic heritage or remember and refresh their past. Modern technology has made it possible for people to maintain and sustain this connection regardless of where they are. For example, one time the New York Times demonstrated a picture of an orthodox Jew at the sacred site of the Wailing Wall in Israel holding a cell phone so that a distant friend could pray (as cited in Poster, 2001). The society that we live in currently has a more comprehensive and advanced communication system beyond a cell phone, including but not limited to email, Skype, and social media. These common communication channels share one thing in common: simultaneity. Poster (2001) recognizes that the simultaneity of email, chat, and current communication means to erase spatial factors that implode time: “these machines (be they print, broadcast, or networked computing) extract us from territorial spaces and phenomenological time, repositioning us in strange new ways” (p. 10). Modern communication technology makes this possible as if the territorial obstacles did not exist. From a personal perspective, the multitude and simultaneity of communication channels with my family back at home make it seem as if I had never left, and I were close to them distance wise.

A Chinese student with whom I had a brief conversation said, “It feels that I am right next to my family by not only hearing their voices, but also seeing their faces on my phone.” Technology not only makes it possible to communicate with one another, but also, more importantly, it serves as a bridge, a bridge to the hearts and souls of people that we care about. Because of this bridge, two sides of the bridge emerge: “Because of

the bridge, the banks emerge; the banks are not there, but because of the bridge, there are those banks, and bridges opened up this new space for us” (Heidegger, 2008a, p. 354). Modern technology indeed has opened up a space, where students can belong to a wider community that stretches across national borders and over geographic distance (Montgomery, 2010). How different would it be had we gone back to earlier times where there were only limited means of communication, also delayed and inconvenient? Would that add to the loneliness of those students by not being able to communicate with their families and support systems back at home? On the other hand might less reliance on technology encourage more immersion in the U.S. culture and belonging?

International Students as Bridge

According to the Open Doors statistics from the Institute of International Education (IIE), the number one country of origin for international students in the U.S. is China, with about 157,558 students enrolled in American higher education institutions in the 2010-2011 academic year. This is almost 22 percent of the total international student population in the U.S (OpenDoors, IIE, 2011). Oftentimes, international students serve as a channel to unfold one world to another, a bridge to link two worlds together. They are often described as “people ambassadors.” However, due to this invisibly and subconsciously assigned label to those students, they feel as if they are the representatives of their country and culture, and they have to present the best to the outside world. I wonder how much this label and assumptions influence being their authentic selves? In serving as a bridge, how much sacrifice have they undertaken personally and professionally?

Aoki (1981) states, “When two strangers meet, indeed two worlds meet” (p. 219). When two people first meet, usually a handshake is initiated—the touch of the two hands

resembles the basic shape of a bridge, as two ends are created and connected, which also indicates the meeting of the two worlds. However, touch does not just stop at introducing the two worlds together; rather, it extends to helping the two worlds to know and understand each other:

The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others. The hand holds. The hand carries. . . . Two hands fold into one, a gesture meant to carry man into the great oneness. (Heidegger, 2008b, p. 381)

A bridge is not a hand, but it connects two hands, two people, and two worlds. It shares the characteristics of the hand, as it also extends, reaches, holds, and carries. The bridge gathers the fourfold into a site of oneness where we can dwell (Heidegger, 2008b). If students can serve as bridges between people and cultures, will my participants be among those bridges? Will they be brave enough to raise their hands to reach the hands of their American counterparts to build this bridge? What will happen to the souls yet to be brought together from both ends of the bridge?

Loneliness

Loneliness is not uncommon. People get lonely sometimes. Loneliness might be exacerbated when a person is away from family and support systems, such as international students living abroad. Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) conducted a survey on 182 international students in the U.S. about their adjustment: although most of them felt content about their lives and connected to the local community, 29% of students felt lonely, 30% felt homesick often, and 46% felt that they had left part of themselves at home. Those numbers should not be ignored. During my preliminary research and my daily conversations and interactions with some students, almost everyone indicated that

loneliness is an issue for them (as mentioned in Chapter One), and some of them described loneliness as inevitable.

The Inevitability of Loneliness

Is loneliness indeed inevitable as students in my preliminary research indicate? What might be the cause for loneliness of those students? Is it because they do not have sufficient friends? Hunley (2011) notices that fewer friends and lower quality friendships are associated with greater loneliness. I have quite a number of friends, and I consider my friendship high quality, but why am I still lonely? Why am I lonely to the extent that sometimes I do not want to get up in the morning if I do not have a full day planned ahead. Am I afraid of confronting the empty room? I used to think that I was the only one who was lonely, sick, and abnormal until I heard other students indicating that they also encounter loneliness.

Chen (1999) shares her life story in Dartmouth College in *I Sing the Unsung*

Songs:

I was feeling so lonely that every night I would spend hours on the phone talking with every acquaintance I could think of, including all of my Chinese friends. What I really wanted was a person to talk to immediately, and I continued to try to find a meaningful self through the attention of a lover. (p. 164)

Chen and I are two lonely women away from home in a foreign country, but we are not two crazy women who cannot stand being alone and who are desperate for attention and love. The indication of loneliness being *inevitable* from some Chinese students makes me feel both good and bad. I feel good because I am not the only one who feels lonely, and definitely not the only one who has issues and problems. I feel bad because there are still so many people like me, who feel lonely easily and inevitably in this different country that we do not call home. Loneliness is neither as abnormal as I initially considered, nor

is it a rare and curious phenomenon for any particular person: “Loneliness is as much organic to human existence as the blood is to the heart” (Moustakas, 1961, p. 34). Nevertheless, disregarding the commonness of loneliness, it is still an “exceptionally difficult” experience (O’Donohue, 1998, p. 192). But how difficult is it? How do we know if a Chinese student is lonely if that person keeps the loneliness to her/himself? Does geographic uprooting exacerbate loneliness? When I recall my lonely moments, most of them happen to be when I am alone. I wonder if that is true loneliness or if it is just aloneness? Does aloneness potentially lead to loneliness? Meanwhile, does being with people make a person not lonely? Sadler and Johnson (1980) assert that to many people the most agonizing loneliness is experienced not in isolation, but in the midst of a group, in the bosom of a family, and even between friends. When are the moments that Chinese students feel lonely? Does the fact that they are alone in the U.S. with no families around increase their chances of loneliness?

Aloneness vs. Loneliness

Accidentally, I found myself alone while writing on loneliness. A friend pointed out that it must be a miserable experience to write on loneliness while being alone, as it might make me lonelier. I found the comment interesting and thought provoking, and I tried to pay attention to how I felt emotionally while writing on loneliness. I feel only alone but not lonely, because I am conversing with myself on the page, when my thoughts flow and fingers move. When I am out of inspiration, have no more to write, and pause to reflect on loneliness, I find myself in deep loneliness; it feels that I have no one to talk to or turn to, and the subject of loneliness itself finds me in deep loneliness. I wonder whether I would feel the same way had I stayed in a library full of people? Certainly I would not be alone, but would I feel less lonely? I do not know. In order to

find out, I purposefully went to the library during the middle of the day when the library was packed, and I did not find myself more or less lonely. Then I started to question that perhaps there is a difference between aloneness and loneliness. Perhaps my effort to avoid aloneness and loneliness is not true loneliness but the *anxiety of loneliness*, “a defense that attempts to eliminate loneliness by constantly seeking activity with others or by continually keeping busy to avoid facing the crucial questions of life and death” (Moustakas, 1972, p. 20). What kind of crucial questions of life am I trying to avoid? What indeed is the difference between aloneness and loneliness? Is there an association between the aloneness and loneliness of Chinese international students?

Webster defines loneliness as “a state of dejection or grief caused by the condition of being alone...” (Gove & Webster, 2003). I admit that being lonely is normally an unpleasant moment, but I agree with Weiss’s (1973) critique on the definition above that loneliness is only “caused by the condition of being alone” (p. 17). What about other potential causes? Is the definition also indicating that a person cannot be “lonely” if with others? And reversely speaking, does being alone necessarily mean being lonely?

I visited my best friend’s blog one day and read something about when she first moved to another city to start her new job upon college graduation. She wrote, “I first came to this city, without anyone that I knew, without a friend. Sometimes I feel lonelier around people than by myself.” This was several years back and I never knew that she was lonely, and even lonelier surrounded by people. Perhaps in that scenario, she would rather be alone.

Alone, from Old English *all ana*, means “unaccompanied, all by oneself”. “Being alone is simply the objective reality of being without others, without company”

(Moustakas, 1972, pp. 17-18). *Lonely*, is composed of *lone* + *ly*; *lone* is the aphetic shorting of alone, and *ly* is a suffix forming adjectives from nouns and means “having qualities of, appropriate to, fitting.” Aloneness is nothing more than a state of being (Moustakas, 1972). It can be positive or negative depending on the person who is involved and the situation itself. When aloneness is a positive state of being, it refers to not being “by oneself,” but also “with oneself”: one can be one’s true self when being alone, listening to one’s own heart, instead of being restrained by the voices of others. One can take advantage of the opportunity to think, imagine, and plan; it is a time that one gets connected with oneself, a time for self-expression, and self-renewal. From this perspective, one can even grow in aloneness. I wonder whether Chinese international students can perceive aloneness in a positive manner and try not to equate aloneness with loneliness? Is loneliness automatically negative? Should everyone try to avoid loneliness?

Indeed we are used to assigning “loneliness” a negative connotation, as it is a kind of “intense, sharp, encompassing feeling” (Moustakas, 1972, p. 19). In loneliness, we might experience pain, sorrow, anger, and fear intensely and deeply, but in the meanwhile, we are provided an opportunity to encounter ourselves (Moustakas). Being lonely puts us in a radical moment in our lives, because of which we are somehow challenged, threatened, altered, and denied in various ways. But also because of that, we are pushed to start again, and to be born again with openness, spontaneity, and trust (Moustakas). But I wonder how many of us in real life can fully take advantage of being lonely and view it from a positive perspective? And how many could convert it into an opportunity for a fresh start, a new chapter, or even a new self? What is the true essence of loneliness?

Loneliness and Longing

Kirova (2002) notes in *When a Child Feels Left Alone*, “The experience of loneliness expands their (children’s) awareness and sensitivity towards the world, others, and themselves. Perhaps in the experience of loneliness children realize their need to be of worth to someone else” (p. 164). But how much different are children from adults, as human beings? “Children, like adults, want to be of value to concrete other persons who have a particular worth for them. The sense of isolation from the world sharpens our longing for loved and missed ones” (Kirova, 2002, p. 164). When we are lonely, we are disconnected from our surroundings in a sense, and yet in another, we long for some connection. When we are lonely, we wish that those loved ones could be somehow in some way with us. When we are lonely, we recall the happy and festive moments that we had, or imagine what it would be like if we were not lonely, as Kirova depicts:

In loneliness we discover what other people mean to us. We discover the meaning of being loved. Perhaps the true being of loneliness is that it becomes an experience changing the person experiencing it. Perhaps loneliness is our way of becoming human not only because in the experience of loneliness we realize our longing to be “with” the Other but to be “for” the Other. (p. 164)

Usually it is only when something or someone is absent in our life that we realize the importance of them. When Chinese students are away from their families and support systems, the importance of those people start to manifest in a more explicit way. The disconnectedness from both their families back at home and counterparts in the U.S. arouse their longing to be connected and feel at home. Hartog (1980) contends that disconnectedness and longing are two interrelated conditions that form the skeletal frame of loneliness. Disconnectedness indicates that in physical and psychological states a person is alone (Hartog, 1980). A person could experience a sense of disconnectedness by being in a physical locale, becoming a victim of religious prejudice, feeling walled out

by language and cultural barriers as an immigrant, or being a victim of some sort of discrimination. However, those kinds of disconnectedness do not qualify for true loneliness without longing (Hartog, 1980). What are we longing for? It is usually an anxious, painful, indescribable yearning for someone or something--usually something that is absent in our lives. Due to those kinds of particular absences, we somewhat feel “left out, cut off, lost, bereft, forgotten, unwanted, unneeded, or ignored” (Sadler & Johnson, 1980, p. 38). What do Chinese international students long for besides home? I wonder whether Chinese students would experience the same volume and degree of loneliness had they stayed in China and never left? Can they take the opportunity of being in the U.S as a new chapter to reflect on, learn, and grow?

The Phenomenon as Unpacked: Loneliness in Connection

In this chapter, I further unpacked the phenomenon of being Chinese international students. I started with a small Chinese cultural practice— saying “NO” to an offering in order not to lose face, hence to induce the idea of different cultural practices. Afterwards, I explored the floating style of Chinese international students, their identity and identity negotiations while straddling between cultures, and how they adjust to the different cultural environment, including their use of technology as a bridge to build home in the U.S. I also elaborated upon the concept of loneliness since it appeared in my preliminary research as an inevitable issue for some Chinese students. In all, this chapter presented a multifaceted picture of the lived experiences of Chinese international students.

In Chapter three, I draw on Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and Casey as my major philosophers to provide philosophical and methodological groundings for my study. Van Manen’s methodological guide provides the path by which I undertook this study.

CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDING—THE SEEKING OF PLACE AND LANGUAGE

In Chapter One, I turned to the phenomenon of the lived experience of Chinese international students in the United States by using my own personal experience and describing some of the insights in my preliminary research. Chapter One depicted a general picture of what it is like to be a Chinese international student in the U.S. by revealing some aspects of lived lives, such as being far away from home and support, nostalgia for home, and some stories of language and cultural adjustment. In Chapter Two, I explored into the literature and phenomenological sources to further unpack the phenomenon itself, by using etymological resources, poems, and lyrics to render the phenomenon.

In this chapter, the focus is on philosophical grounding and the methodology of phenomenology. I drew on Dilthey, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer as my major philosophic sources and also explicate van Manen's methodological guidelines for engaging in phenomenological research.

Philosophy and Phenomenology

I used to consider philosophy quite abstract, lofty, and distant from our daily life, from human beings and things. It was not until my encounter and engagement with phenomenology and intensive and extensive reading on philosophy for my dissertation research that I realized philosophy is very close to us, entrenched in our daily lives. Philosophy arises from and refers to problems of everyday, human life, and the sum of our experiences is the source of all our knowledge (Dilthey, 1976). Philosophy is the enduring attempt to lay the foundations for understanding humankind. Phenomenology studies human experience to better understand us as beings. Levinas (1987) explicates

philosophy and phenomenology: “Philosophy is an understanding of being, or an ontology, or a phenomenology” (p. 61). Phenomenology is philosophy, and in a sense philosophy is phenomenology, since philosophy is the study of our everyday lives, of which many phenomena are worth studying. So what exactly is phenomenology?

What Is Phenomenology?

“Phenomenology is the study of essences, such as the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989, p. vii). “According to ancient doctrine, the essence of a thing is considered to be *what* the thing is” (Heidegger, 2008e, p. 312). Phenomenology aims to study *what* the thing is. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, and it is “a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989, p. viii). Van Manen (2002) says, “Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (p. 9). Phenomenology compels me to have a real and deep connection with the lifeworld, and allows me to see things with fresh eyes, with minimum preconceptions or theories used to categorize. It teaches me to see what it is to be living in the world, the world that is “already there” before our reflection begins, and to see what is behind that which I see on the surface (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989, p. viii).

The expression “phenomenology” consists of two components: *phenomenon* and *logos*, which goes back to the Greek terms, *phainomenon* and *logos*. The Greek expression *Phainomenon*, which comes from the verb *phainesthai*, means “to show itself.” *Logos* means “word, speech, discourse,” also “reason” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). Heidegger concedes that *logos* as speech means to make manifest “what is being talked about” in speech (Heidegger, 2008d, p. 78). “Aristotle explicates this

function of speech more precisely as *apophainesthai*” (2008d, p. 78). Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*:

The expression ‘phenomenology’ can be formulated in Greek as *legein ta phainomena*. But *legein* means *apophainesthai*. Hence phenomenology means: *apophainesthai ta phainomena*—to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself. (1962, p. 81)

The meaning of phenomenology means nothing other than the maxim, “To the things themselves!” (Heidegger, 2008d, p. 72) What indeed does it mean “to the things themselves?”

To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989, p. ix)

Phenomenology helps us to learn about the world as it is; however, the world is “already there,” and we need to respect the way it is, rather than bringing our perceptions or knowledge before knowing the facticity of the world. Phenomenology does not seek a reduced world, i.e. an idea that has been reduced to a theme of discourse, but it seeks essences, and looks for “what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization” (Merleau-Ponty, p. xv). Phenomenology is a method to present the world as it is to the world.

A concept of method. Heidegger (2008d) asserts, “Phenomenology signifies primarily *a concept of method*, it does not characterize the ‘what’ of the objects of philosophical research in terms of their content but the ‘how’ of such research” (p. 72). Indicating that my study is phenomenological research does not reveal what the subject of my study is; rather, it demonstrates a methodology, i.e. how my study is conducted as I go back to things themselves, to let the phenomenon speak for itself. What kind of approach does this methodology take?

The methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless; in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques, and concepts that would rule-govern the research project. (van Manen, 2002, p. 29)

Persons who conduct phenomenological research need to be presuppositionless. In order to show the experiences of Chinese international students, I need to turn to those students, as they themselves experience the phenomenon. I need to let the students speak, rather than I speaking for them. I should bracket and not be restrained by the numerous presuppositions I bring to the study. I need to show their experience as it is, rather than what we presume it should be. It is easy to assume that I could speak for them since I am one of them, and that I might be having the same experience that enables me to understand them before I begin. Nevertheless, does being Chinese myself grant me the right to speak for other Chinese? Do I indeed “understand” their experience? No one completely understands a situation unless that person has experienced it or is currently experiencing it.

Understanding requires us to “transpose ourselves,” which means if we put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, we will understand him/her—i.e., “become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person—by putting *ourselves* in his [sic] position” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 304). I am already in a similar position; however, it does not automatically mean that I understand or can speak for the experience of Chinese international students in general, as each person’s experience is individualized unique. My self-understanding is far away from understanding the experiences of Chinese international students in general. I must go to Chinese international graduate students themselves to obtain a better understanding of them.

Hermeneutical phenomenology. As noted above, phenomenology has to do with self-manifestation. But,

An entity can show itself from itself [von ihm selbst her] in many ways, depending in which case on the kind of access we have to it. Indeed it is even possible for an entity to show itself as something which in itself it is not. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 51)

Things do not always show themselves as they are; or sometimes they show themselves as what they are not, in cases of dissembling, seeming, illusion, and other such phenomena. Therefore, phenomenology cannot be simply descriptive; rather, “Phenomenology is seeking after a meaning which is perhaps hidden by the entity’s mode of appearing” (Moran, 2000, p. 229). In that case, the proper model for seeking meaning is the interpretation of a text, which is also the reason Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics (Moran, 2000).

What is hermeneutics? “Hermeneutics” which comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuin*, means to “interpret”. Hermeneutics derives from the Greek god, Hermes, who was responsible for communication between Zeus and other gods and ordinary mortals. Heidegger further elaborates in *Being and Time*, “The phenomenology of *Dasein* is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this world, where it designates this business of interpreting” (1962, p. 62). “Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation” (van Manen, 2002, p. 179). Phenomenology is the traditional name for the art of interpretation (Moran, 2000).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger interprets hermeneutics as an interpretive phenomenology, and he describes that hermeneutic understanding is not to re-experience the experiences of others, but rather to grasp one’s own possibilities in the world. Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology has two elements to its methodology: first it is

descriptive (phenomenological) to be attentive to how things appear, and let things speak for themselves; second it is *interpretive* (hermeneutic) because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. Heidegger perceives that hermeneutics is not just the method that he developed for historical and cultural sciences, but the whole manner in which human existence is interpretative (Heidegger, 1962).

“The task of hermeneutics is to clarify the miracle of understanding” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 292). Understanding, designated by Heidegger, as “a fundamental *existentiale* of *Dasein*,” needs to be clarified (Heidegger, 1962, p. 192). *Dasein* is a being that understands his own Being and possibilities of Being. However, understanding and interpretation are basically the same thing (Heidegger, 1962; Gadamer, 1975/2008). “In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 188). To understand is to interpret. Interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding. Interpretation does not arise from understanding, nor is interpretation the acquiring of information of what is understood (Heidegger, 1962). However, whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation is founded on essentially “*something we have, see, and grasp in advance—our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception*” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 191). It means that our understanding has the ‘fore’ structure of its own, due to which our understanding forms a circle (Heidegger, 1962). But does this even make sense? We are trying to understand something or disclose an answer based on what we know or what we anticipate to know. What kind of circle is this? Is it open or closed? Is this circle a vicious one? Heidegger (1962) elaborates on this circle of understanding:

This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of *Dasein* itself. It is not

to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (p. 195)

Heidegger (1962) contends that this circle is not a closed or “vicious” one as in cases of circular reasoning; rather it involves a certain “relatedness of backward or forward” in a progressive manner (p. 28). In this circle, our questioning “serves as a kind of light that casts a certain pattern on the phenomenon we study, while also filling in our expectations in a way that allows us to formulate further questions, and hence to advance our understanding” (Moran, 2002, p. 237).

Getting Back to the Things Themselves

In order to obtain understanding of some experience, what is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way, to get back to things themselves. Where do we start to get to things themselves? From what and how do we learn about some experience?

Learning through Questioning

“Everything is an experience” (Heidegger, 1962/2008, p. 204). We learn as we experience. Experience, from Latin *experiential*, as a noun, means “knowledge gained by repeated trials” and “state of having done something and gotten handy at it;” as a verb, it means, “to test, try”. Heidegger (1971) interprets, “Experience means *enundo assequi*, to obtain something along the way, to attain something by going on a way” (p. 66).

Gadamer (1975/2004) asserts, “We cannot have experiences without asking questions” (p. 356). We question all the time, alone as well with others. Questioning is how we

engage with our world. “Every questioning is a seeking” (Heidegger, 2008d, p. 45). We are seeking answers to our questions, clarifications for our doubts, and eventually and essentially seeking who we are as human beings. Among all these questions that we have, what is the most fundamental one? Heidegger (2008d) says it is the question of Being.

To work out the question of Being means to make a being—he who questions—perspicuous in his Being. Asking this question, as a mode of *being* of a being, is itself essentially determined by what is asked about in it—Being. (Heidegger, 1962/2008, p. 47)

“The first concern in the question of Being must be an analysis of *Dasein*”

(Heidegger, 2008d, p. 59). What is *Dasein*?

Dasein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its Being this being is concerned about its very Being... *Dasein* always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. (Heidegger, 1927/2008, p.53-54)

However “*Dasein* itself is distinctly different from other beings” (Heidegger, 2008d, p. 53). Heidegger (1969), in *Identity and Difference*, differentiates yet connects Being and being:

Being grounds beings, and beings, as what *is* most of all, account for Being. One comes over the other, one arrives in the other. (p. 69)

Arrival means: to keep concealed in unconcealedness—to abide present in this keeping—to be a being. (p. 64)

Concealing and unconcealing, indicating inauthentic and authentic, forms the manner that *Dasein*, the Being that understands its current existence and also chooses “its possibility to be itself or not to be itself”, unfolds in its everydayness (Heidegger, 1962, p. 33).

Learning from Average Everydayness

Learning resides in everything and in its everydayness, in things we encounter

and people we meet. We learn and grow from our everydayness. It is unfortunate that we have neglected the importance of everydayness in our studies. The major part of our existence as human beings is not to dive into the deep reflexive contemplation of its what and why; instead, what matters more to us is to get on with the happenings of our lives, which is the mode of *Dasein*'s average everydayness, uncovered in its undifferentiated character (Heidegger, 1962). "This undifferentiated character of *Dasein*'s everydayness is *not nothing*, but a positive phenomenal characteristic of this entity" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 69). In *Dasein*'s everydayness, this being "can show itself to itself on its own terms" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 59). It is in the everydayness that essential structures are to be demonstrated, which are also determinative in every mode of being of *Dasein*. Therefore, looking at and into the everydayness of *Dasein* is the first step to learn about and to understand the question of Being: "By looking at the fundamental constitution of the everydayness of *Dasein* we shall bring out in a preparatory way the Being of this being" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 59).

Everydayness serves as a good starting and ending point to study the lived experience of Chinese international graduate students. Indeed, every happening resides in the ordinary and normal everydayness, and we should view it as an item that covers all aspects of one's being, rather than taking *Dasein*'s average everydayness as "a mere aspect" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 69). It is in the average everydayness that our authenticity and inauthenticity unfold. Although our everydayness is a good starting point for us to study our own Beings, it can only be a provisional one. Heidegger argues that we are "falling" into our ordinary world, and that is the way we live our lives in the midst of the world, wherein we do not live in truth all the time. If we do not disclose ourselves, rather

cover up or conceal, we are being our inauthentic ourselves. The value of our everydayness cannot be denied or neglected. It is in its everydayness that Chinese international graduate students face occasions that they are under, such as anxiety, dread, nothingness, as they are away from home, uprooted, and disoriented. These circumstances bring forth both their inauthenticities and authenticities. One might wonder what is the value of studying inauthenticity? “It is absolutely not the case that humans can dwell in the authentic all their lives” (Moran, 2000, p. 239). As a matter of fact, we live in an inauthentic way most of the time, and inauthentic is the *very condition* of authenticity (Heidegger, 1962; Moran, 2000). In some situations, we are more authentic; while in others, we are more inauthentic. We have the options to choose to be ourselves or not to be ourselves. Are Chinese international graduate students their authentic or inauthentic beings in their everydayness?

Anxiety

When a person first comes to a different place that she or he knows very little about, all kinds of feelings and emotions can come to the person, such as displacement, desolation, and isolation. These are normal feelings. Regardless of being either excited or nervous, one arrives at a place with quite a number of concerns. Those concerns can be anything simple or complicated in life, as the way the world is. That concern is more about the possibilities, and about what might take place tomorrow and in the future, and that concern is called “anxiety” according to Heidegger. “Anxiety is not only anxiety in the face of something, but, as a state of mind, it is also *anxiety about* something” (Heidegger, 2008c, p. 232). Anxiety, as a basic state of mind, which belongs to *Dasein*’s essential state of Being-in-the-world, is actually rather a shapeless mood that does not have a precise object. As a matter of fact, anxiety is precisely anxiety over nothing, other

than the very Being-in-the-world itself: “Being-anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 232). As a state of mind, anxiety makes manifest “how one is” (Heidegger, p. 233). Everyone has this state of mind, and it varies depending on when and where that person is at, hence the *how* is different. I wonder *how* Chinese international graduate students are while in the U.S? How do they perceive this world? What and how will they overcome? Heidegger contends that, in anxiety, one feels “uncanny,” which also means “not-being-at-home” in this world (p. 233). Being not at home both physically and metaphorically, I wonder whether the anxiety of Chinese international graduate students increases, since they are more concerned about their Being-in-the-world in a different world other than the previous and familiar one? Is it more about the anxiety over *nothing*, but Being-in-the-World?

Heidegger (1962) states:

Anxiety makes manifest in *Dasein* its *Being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being—that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings *Dasein* face to face with its *Being-free for (propensio in ...)* the authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is. (p. 188)

Being free to choose itself and its possibilities potentially discloses the authenticity of one’s Being. Anxiety brings forth the authenticity of oneself, as Moran (2002) recognizes: “Anxiety leads us to drop the mask of our everyday familiarity of the world” (p. 241). Because of anxiety, the mask has been dropped, which means that we can be in authentic moments, where we can be “at home with ourselves, at one with ourselves,” (Moran, 2002, p. 240), especially when we are homeless in a foreign country.

Nothingness

To come to a different country is an exciting yet terrifying experience at the beginning. A person does not know anyone in that place, potentially not even her/himself.

One is lost. One is lost in the unfamiliarity of everything: the landscape, the neighborhood, and the empty streets. It is a desolate feeling to have no one to talk to, no one to turn to, and nowhere to go. It might sound impossibly alienating that the person is in the middle of nowhere, although literally speaking, she or he is still in some place. Nevertheless, the emptiness and loneliness in a person's heart makes it difficult to see what is actually out there, to appreciate the beauty of the place in which the person is currently located. What is taking place outside of that person is not a concern, as the person does not see the relevance and connection to him/her at that moment. When the outside is quiet, that person feels empty and finds the boredom of the outside world; when the outside is busy with its happenings, that makes it even more contradictory to that person's empty heart, as she or he has nothing.

Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948) writes in the *Night Scenery of the Lotus Pond*:

There are one or two spots of road lamplight, dim and without any vigor, just like eyes of a person who desires sleep. At this moment, the ones who are enjoying themselves are those cicadas in the trees and frogs in the water; yet the joy belongs to them, I have nothing. (1968, p. 73)
(My translation)

Does he indeed have nothing? Can he not feel what is going on in nature? Definitely not; otherwise he could not have heard the voices of those cicadas, and he could not even feel that they were having a good time. Here, the “nothing” is more a state of mind, a sense of emptiness.

Four Existentials

Van Manen (2002) notices that all phenomenological human science research efforts seek to explore the structures of the immense complexities of the human lifeworld, which reside in the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations. In order to understand the complexity of the world as it is, van Manen suggests four

existentials as guides for reflections in the research process: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality). No matter what kind of phenomenon we are researching or experiencing, the four fundamental existentials belong to the existential ground by way of which all human beings are in the world, although somehow they individualize in one way or another (van Manen, 2000). The four fundamental existentials “can be differentiated but not separated. They all form an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld—our lived world” (van Manen, p. 104).

The four basic existentials certainly form the basic structure of the experiences of Chinese international students. For instance, coming to a foreign country is first a change of place, and “walking alone in a foreign and busy city may render a sense of lostness, strangeness, vulnerability, and possibly excitement or stimulation. In general, we may say that we become the space we are in” (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). When we discuss place, we are also talking about time. When we say someone is at some place, we are also putting a time frame to it, such as which day, which month and which year. Being in a new place can also remind us of being in previous places, hence the memories of those places, which also can date back to time.

Van Manen (2002) notices, “We are always bodily in the world” (p. 103). Every experience is a bodily experience. Our bodies are the first means that we reveal ourselves to the world and to know the world first and directly. “When we first come [sic] to this world, our bodies came with us and since then the bodies became permanence [sic] in us and the body is with us” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989, p. 90). Indeed, our bodies are always with us wherever we go, at whatever time, and with whatever experiences we

have. Abram (1997) notes, “The living body is thus the very possibility of contact, not just with others but with oneself—the very possibility of reflection, of thought, of knowledge” (p. 45). We build the relationship with the world that we reside in through this contact with ourselves and with others. Van Manen (2002) comments, “*Lived other* (relationality) is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (p. 104). To live in the world is to find out who we are and to learn about who others are as well. For my participants, it is inevitable that they have to learn how to live with others in a foreign land and get to know more about themselves.

On Caring

Heidegger (1962) contends, “Being-in-the-world is essentially care” (p. 193). To better understand Being, the most primordial and basic existential truth is the “*disclosedness of the meaning of the Being of care*” (Heidegger, p. 365).

To Care

Noddings (2005) interprets Heidegger on care:

Martin Heidegger (1962) described care as the very Being of human life. His use of the term is very broad, covering an attitude of solicitousness toward other living beings, a concern to do things meticulously, the deepest existential longings, fleeting moments of concern, and all the burdens and woes that belong to human life. From his perspective, we are immersed in care; it is the ultimate reality of life. (p. 15)

We are immersed in care from others and for others. In some circumstances, we are givers, the one-caring; while in others, we are recipients, the cared-for (Noddings, 1984).

Care, from the Old English *carian*, *cearia*, means to “be anxious, grieve, to feel concern or interest.” To care is to be anxious about something, to show interest and concern. However, is showing interest or concern sufficient enough to be considered care? The answer is no. The meaning of care “is not to be confused with meanings such

as wishing well, liking, comforting, and maintaining, or simply having an interest in what happens to another” (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 1). To care requires some action on the behalf of the cared-for, such as spending time with that person, listening to his/her needs and desires, helping with the situation if needed (Noddings, 1984). Caring goes beyond just good intentions or warm regards:

To care for someone, I must know many things. I must know, for example, who the other is, what his powers and limitations are, what his needs are, and what is conducive to his growth; I must know how to respond to his needs, and what my own powers and limitations are. (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 9)

My research interest in studying the lived experience of Chinese international graduate students in the U.S. originated from my care for them. The whole study that I undertook is a caring process: to get to understand and respond to their needs.

To Be Cared for

“As human beings we want to care and to be cared for” (Noddings, 1984, p. 7). It is easy to care or not to care. Most of the time we care out of love or because we think someone or something is relevant to our lives, such as a parent caring for a child, a teacher caring for a pupil, a psychotherapist caring for his patient, or a husband caring for his wife. It is easier to care for our loved ones than for strangers. Oftentimes we might hear comments such as, “Why should I care? It has nothing to do with me!” Yes, indeed, why should I care? Why is it not enough for me to care only for myself, why should I even bother to care for others, and strangers? Does it have anything to do with me? Why should we care for international students? Will they even realize that we care for them?

Mayeroff (1971) describes the point of view of the one cared for when he realizes he is being cared for:

When the other is with me, I feel I am not alone, I feel understood, not in some detached way but because I feel he knows what it is like to be me. I realize that he

wants to see me as I am, not in order to pass judgment on me, but to help me. I do not have to conceal myself by trying to appear better than I am; instead, I can open myself up for him, let him get close to me, and thereby make it easier for him to help me. Realizing that he is with me helps me to see myself and my world more truly, just as someone repeating my words may give me the opportunity really to listen to myself and have the meaning of my own words come home to me more completely. (pp. 31-32)

To care for Chinese international graduate students is to *be with* those who are away from home, uprooted, disoriented, or maybe lost. To care for them is to *encourage* them to open up and be their authentic selves. To care for them is to *understand* them as if we are insiders of their lives. To care for them is to help them *find* meanings of their lives and *find* their place in this world, as well as our own. To care for others is to care for oneself: “Caring for self, for the *ethical self*, can emerge only from a caring for other” (Noddings, 1984, p. 14).

To care for Chinese international students is to care for myself. In this caring relationship, the one-caring and the cared-for learn and grow together. In caring, meaningful friendship emerges, and caring becomes “contagious”: “My caring for the other helps activate his caring for me; and similarly his caring for me helps activate my caring for him, it ‘strengthens’ me to care for him” (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 26). I want to extend this “contagious” caring to my readers and those who want to be concerned about Chinese international graduate students, and develop meaningful friendships with those students who speak different languages.

What Is in A Language?

“Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 390). With no language, communication and understanding will be difficult. What would it be like had we had no language at all? Would we be able to understand each other from generation to generation and also among our present peers?

To understand one other requires engagement with one another. Language is the way that we engage with others and the world. Language is the medium from which “our whole experience of the world, and especially hermeneutical experience, unfolds” (Gadamer, p. 453). Language expresses our thoughts, emotions, care, and essentially our Being. To speak a language is to express oneself and be understood. What if the language is a foreign language? What if this foreign language cannot make the person who speaks it understood? Can we still say that the person is speaking the language?

Who Is Speaking Whom?

Gadamer (1975/2004) notes, “It is literally more correct to say that language speaks us, rather than we speak it,” especially when it is a foreign language (p. 459). He contends that we cannot find the exact word in a foreign language, as there is no such word that exists. I often find myself incapable of finding the exact word that I am looking for in English to express myself, as I often use sentences such as, “How do you say that word in English?” or “I do not know how to say it in English.” Gadamer is right: as we speak a foreign language, we are actually translating our own language to a foreign language. Every translation is actually an interpretation, as the translators bring themselves into the context. That is why there are different versions of translation by different authors for the same piece of work, because the authors bring themselves into the context and add new meaning into the translation.

It is the same with the philosophical works in our phenomenological encountering. For a person who speaks a foreign language and has to use it in daily life, that person is in the midst of translation, interpretation, and application (Gadamer, 1975/2004). It is no exaggeration to say that translation has to be interpretation, and also direct translation does not make sense in a foreign language sometimes. Since there is no

way I could find the most accurate word to express myself to make the language speak for me, I often end up speaking the original word in Chinese and add my interpretation to explain and express myself. The words have been spoken, but has the meaning been found? Has the person who is speaking it been spoken for? Can that language speak for that person?

The Meaning of Teacher through Chinese Translation

The word teacher in Chinese is 老师, *lao shi*, “老” means old, aged, experienced, and “师” means the one who teaches, one who specializes in a particular field, an example (*Chinese Etymology Dictionary*, 2011). A famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, Han Yu (768-824 A.D.), in his essay 师说, *shi shuo* (*shuo* means to discuss), says, “师者, 所以传道授业解惑也” *shi zhe, suo yi chuan dao shou ye jie huo ye*, meaning that teacher, is the one to transmit knowledge and clarify doubts. The word “teacher” in English is considered the most accurate and appropriate translation by social norms, which means the one to “show, point out, and to give instructions.” The meanings of the two words are almost the same in both Chinese and English. However, when I translate the word 老师, *lao shi*, do I simply utilize the word “teacher,” or do I have to have additional explanation for it, such as the meaning of the word 老, *lao*? If we use the word “senior teacher” in English, are we implying that only those who are senior or older are qualified to be teachers? Does age mean more experience and authority? Can a younger person teach something valuable to a person who is older?

Han Yu writes: “吾师道也, 夫庸知其年之先后生于吾乎? 是故无贵无贱, 无长无少, 道之所存, 师之所存也”, *wu shi dao ye, fu yong zhi qi nian zhi xian hou sheng yu wu hu? shi gu wu gui wu jian, wu zhang wu shao, dao zhi suo cun, shi zhi suo cun ye*. It

means: my teacher, does it matter that he was born before or after me? There is no issue of being rich or poor, being older or younger, because wherever there is knowledge, there is a teacher. Even Han Yu figured it out almost 1,300 years ago, why people still keep the word “老 *lao*” to “师 *shi*”, for the one who teaches? Does age indeed matter in what it means to be a teacher? If it is what Han Yu says, “Wherever there is knowledge, there is a teacher,” can the word “teacher” be used outside the classroom, outside of school systems?

The word “老师” is widely used and accepted outside of classroom in China, even in places such as a hair salon. The word “老师” goes beyond simply a title or a profession, rather, respect towards the person who is involved. For instance, my academic advisor is Chinese and I realize that I never have called her “教授,” professor, but I have always been calling her “老师.” I am certainly not denying that there is no respect calling her professor, but somehow the word “老师” has some emotional attachment to it. There is an old Chinese saying, “一日为师，终生为父” *yi ri wei shi, zhong sheng wei fu*, meaning that if a person is your teacher for one day, that person will be your father for the rest of your life. Father used to be considered head of the family in ancient China, who also has a personal and close relationship with the child (*ren*). How could a stranger who teaches be considered a father to the child in Chinese culture? The relationship between the teacher and student is not simply limited to teaching and learning; rather, personal care is significantly manifested as well. Nevertheless, I do not consider my advisor “father,” but rather “mother.” I sometimes joke with my friends that my advisor is my “academic mother,” as she not only cares about my academic performance and achievement, but also my personal well-being. It is a joke yet it is not a joke, as I feel the

warmth from her as a mentor, a mother, and a friend. I feel the same way to the dissertation Chair as well. What is the meaning of the word “teacher”? What does it mean to teach? Can the “father” and “mother” aspects of a “teacher” be understood by non-Chinese? Will the use of “teacher” outside of school systems make sense to Americans?

Occasions are numerous that we cannot find the right word to express ourselves when speaking a foreign language. The word “老师” *laoshi* is only one among many. There are many words and expressions for which we cannot find the right word in a foreign language. Yu Qiuyu (1992) felt an overwhelming familiarity and at-homeness when he was at a Chinese herbal Medicine store, during his trip to the Singapore. He states that he told the Chinese herb medicine doctor there that he was aware that he was not sick, that he only felt a little bit inner 热 *re* since he had just arrived there a few months ago. What is this *re* that he is talking about? He explains:

It is true, the 热 *re* that I am talking about is not fever by Western medicine standard, because my temperature is normal and I do not have a fever. So when I say this 热 *re* to western doctors, I might get kicked out; while only Chinese doctors understand what I am talking about. (p. 454)

The word 热 *re* means, “hot” in Chinese. Those who do not know the context may find it silly if we talk about this inner hotness. Are the bodies of Chinese people different? Do only Chinese people get this kind of inner 热 *re*? Why does the direct translation not make sense in a different language and cultural context?

Not only do I encounter situations where I cannot find the right word in English, but also similar situations happen when I try to find appropriate words for some English words, such as the word “deserve,” which comes from Old French *deservir*, meaning to “be worthy of, earn, merit,” and which is also one of the most frequently used words in

our daily conversations. I feel that I can grasp the meaning of this word; however, I have yet found the word to express it in Chinese. Do “deserve something” and “deserve someone” have the same translation? Why do I feel that I understand, however cannot explain it in my mother tongue? What is behind a word?

A Word Is An Image

Since each language is so unique, and there is no right word equivalent in another language, should we even continue to try? Why is finding the right word so important? Isn't it only a word? What is a word? Heidegger (1971) notices, “Only where the word for the thing has been found is the thing a thing. ... The word alone gives being to the thing” (p. 62). A book is called a book, rather than a pen; a sputnik is called a sputnik rather than atom or rocket (Heidegger, 1971). Because of the way that we call those things, those things become what they are; hence, their being has been brought forth; because of the words to describe those things, they become unique in order to differentiate from other things. Using Heidegger's words, “Only the word makes a thing appear as the thing it is, and thus lets it be present” (p. 65). The thing is not that thing without the appropriate word to describe it; hence it loses its meaning of presence. Therefore, it is significantly important that we find the right word for a particular thing. Here, it seems that we are trying to grasp the relation between the word and the thing; however, the connection is not that the thing is on one side while the word is on the other. Instead, the being of the thing is imbedded in the word, hence “The word itself is the relation which in each instance retains the thing within itself in such a manner that it ‘is’ a thing” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 66).

But what exactly is the word for which we strive? What is behind the word? What is behind the language? Is a word simply a sign to name a particular thing? According to

Gadamer (1975/2004):

A word is not only a sign. In a sense that is hard to grasp, it is also something almost like a copy or image... A word has a mysterious connection with what it 'images;' it belongs to its being. (p. 416)

That is why we strive to seek the right word—"the word that really belongs to the thing—so that in it the thing comes into language" (p. 417). Gadamer (1975/ 2004) utters this point to its fullest extent:

When a person lives in a language, he is filled with the sense of the unsurpassable appropriateness of the words he uses for the subject matter he is talking about. It seems impossible that other words in other languages could name the things equally well. The suitable word always seems to be one's own and unique, just as the thing referred to is always unique. The agony of translation consists ultimately in the fact that the original words seem to be inseparable from the things they refer to, so that to make a text intelligible one often has to give an interpretive paraphrase of it rather than translate it. (p. 403)

It is true. Every word we speak in one language is unique, just as every subject we talk about and we live in is unique; every culture and society that the language has originated from is unique. They form a unique system in which it only makes sense in certain contexts, and there is an inseparability of the language and the system. Saussure (1966) recognizes that a human language is not a collection of terms that possess different designated meanings, but it is a complexly ramified web, wherein the knots, or terms, hold their specific place or meaning either by their direct or indirect relations to all other terms within the language.

Our daily communication is a process and an effort to seek the right word, the right way of expression, and certainly the right context to utilize the word that we have chosen. It is an effort we undergo to improve our communication, i.e., to convey messages and to achieve mutual understanding. That is also why communication is no easy task, let alone the multi-fold difficulty when it is across languages.

When I hear the foreign language, I try to interpret it and to have it make sense to me; when I speak the language, I do the same thing to have it make sense to those who are listening to me. It is an effort to understand others and make oneself understood. Gadamer (1975/2004) notices, “Every interpretation includes the possibility of a relationship with others” (p. 399). To interpret is not a one-end issue; rather it is both ends, as it connects both ends together by making each end understood, which is also the goal of communication, to make understanding achieved through interpretation.

Interpretation and Understanding

“Interpretation is the explicit form of understanding” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 306). Interpret, is directly from the Latin *interpretari*, meaning to “explain, expound, understand”. To interpret is an act of explaining why things make sense to us, and to understand. It is to find the connection between the situation and the person who is trying to interpret it. “Every interpretation has its fore-having, its fore-sight, and its fore-conception” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 275). When we are interpreting, we also bring ourselves and our pre-understandings to the situation to see whether it can speak to us, and for us. Gadamer says, “To interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak for us” (p. 398). Therefore, it is not only to understand what is in the text or the situation; but also to understand oneself better for the one who is trying to interpret. When we bring ourselves in, we actually bring our differences in, as each of us is different. Therefore, every single attempt to interpret is an attempt to understand and to produce new meanings. As Gadamer describes, “Understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well” (p. 296). To understand is to interpret, and vice versa. “Understanding and interpretation are ultimately the same thing” (Gadamer, p.

390). To understand others is to understand oneself, understand the similarities and differences between the two.

To study the phenomenon of the lived experience of Chinese international graduate students is to help me gain a better understanding of not only them, but also myself. The employment of phenomenology as my methodology to understand my participants is an interpretive process based on the unfolding of their lived experiences.

Philosophical Dilemma

I encountered many questions about phenomenology as my methodology and the philosophers upon which I drew. One of the most frequently asked questions was, “How do you take on the fact that Heidegger was involved with the Nazi party, and yet you still use his philosophy for your research?” I pondered this question for a long time and at first did not know how to respond. But as I read more and give myself more reflection time, I think I have an answer for that question.

Firstly, I used Heidegger’s philosophy instead of him to guide my research. His contribution to philosophy and phenomenology is incomparable in the twentieth century. He influenced many philosophers who studied with him, such as Hans-George Gadamer, Herbert Marcuse, Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, and so on, although not everyone necessarily agreed with him (Moran, 2002). The imprint he left on the twentieth-century philosophy cannot be removed due to an egregious mistake that he made in his life.

Secondly, Heidegger is no saint and certainly made mistakes like the rest of us do.

However, we have to put the mistake into context. I question how contemporary persons judge or evaluate a person in history based on the current context, as if the person to be judged lived in the same era. However, obviously, we do not. To have a better understanding of persons or events in history, we need to position them in the contexts in

which they lived, although it is highly possible that we can never imagine or understand what it means to live in a specific/particular context.

Gadamer once wrote in *Back From Syracuse?*:

The younger generation of Germans will also, clearly, not have an easy time imagining how things were for us in those days: the wave of conformism, the pressure, the ideological indoctrination, the unforeseeable sanctions, and so on. It can happen today that one is asked: why did you people not cry out? There is a tendency, above all, to underestimate the universally human inclination to conformism, which continually finds new ways and means of self-deception. (1989, p. 427)

Yes, the question is, why did people not cry out? Could they even cry out? Why did Heidegger not cry out? Instead of crying out, he chose silence, chose to conform and compromise, and to submit to those in power. Now one might think that one should stand up for his or her beliefs, but is it indeed as easy to do as it is to say? Who is not afraid of death? Who wants to give up one's aspiration and die for nothing? Even if persons are not afraid of death, their families and loved ones might still hold them to have a second thought.

Heidegger is no hero. Like most of us, he chose to compromise and to survive in the harsh days of human history. But he continued with his exploration of Being, published *Being and Time* and many other works, and continued to influence many philosophers to come. If Heidegger's mistake cannot be ignored, his contribution to philosophy cannot either, and the former definitely should not overshadow the latter. If I cannot use Heidegger's work due to the mistake that he made as a person, it is similar to being told that we cannot appreciate Cézanne or Van Gogh's work due to their mental instability. If I cannot use Heidegger's work, does it also mean that I cannot use the work of Gadamer, Arendt, and other philosophers, because they had studied with Heidegger

and been greatly influenced by him?

Gadamer pondered the same dilemma for years, and criticized the claim that Heidegger's political errors had nothing to do with his philosophy, by those who overly admired Heidegger as a great philosopher, a great thinker. As a person and philosopher greatly influenced by Heidegger, Gadamer was disappointed at Heidegger's "belief" in Hitler, his endorsement of the Nazi Party, and his political silence. Gadamer wanted to get by Heidegger, but he could not.

It is not that easy to get by Heidegger. Even one who lost faith because of Heidegger's political adventures, kept away from him for years, and together with him and others lived through to the end the increasingly dark future of their common country—even such a person could never dream of denying the philosophical impetus he received early on from Heidegger, an impulse often renewed later. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 429)

Gadamer was not only talking to himself, but also to tell those who had similar doubts and questioning about Heidegger in his era, and many to come. I cannot get by or deny Heidegger either. I cannot help ask myself: if we do not embrace the philosophy of a philosopher, the artwork of an artist, on what grounds do we value their work? Can we imagine being positioned in that tough era of history? What kind of life and personal choices would we have made with dreams yet to fulfill, and families in danger?

Heidegger contributed significantly to the twentieth-century philosophy, to an extent that it is almost impossible to measure it (Moran, 2000). He cannot be ignored.

Whoever thinks we can here and now dispense with Heidegger has not begun to fathom how difficult it was and remains for anyone *not* to dispense with him, as opposed to making a fool of oneself with supercilious gestures. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 430)

Therefore, I would not allow Heidegger's egregious mistake to overshadow his accomplishment as a philosopher and his contribution to philosophy. I will continue to

draw on Heidegger for my research.

Journeying: Searching between Places

Life itself is a journey full of various experiences. It is a journey to move among and between places; it is a journey to discover and explore oneself, to find out who we are and who we can become. It is a journey to search for our own Being.

Searching for My Own Being

Nietzsche once said, “Whoever is searching for the human being first must find the lantern” (as cited in van Manen, 2002, p. 4). I have found my lantern, phenomenology. My very first encounter with phenomenology opened a window for me to see the openness and authenticity of everyone in the classroom. From that moment on, I decided to return to and re-discover the authentic me, instead of covering up who I am, by trying to be who I am not. *Authentic*, from Greek *authentikos*, means original, genuine, and principle. Authenticity and inauthenticity, are the two modes of Being, depending on the anxiety that one is in (Heidegger, 1962). Phenomenology granted me the opportunity not only to converse with philosophers on the page, such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Dilthey, and Casey, but also to dialogue with my classmates on life and philosophy, and to start the exploratory journey to search for my own Being.

Studying the lived experience of Chinese international graduate students helped me with my own search for Being. Journeying from one country to another, I often raise many questions to myself, many of which could be what Chinese international students ask themselves as well. I might never get a chance to ask some questions had I stayed in China and never left. Who am I? Am I Chinese or American? In the U.S, I am considered Chinese; while in China, I am considered “American.” Perhaps I have lost some old parts of me, but gained something new as well. I am in between. Will I forever be in between?

My embarking on the journey from China to the U.S, my philosophical journeying to search for my own Being helped me to question, think, and reflect more on my own experience. Having a similar but individualized journey, I wonder what the experiences of Chinese international students are like?

Van Manen (2002) states that the aim of phenomenology is:

To transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence--in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

Phenomenology, my lantern, allowed me to get inside of the lifeworld of Chinese international graduate students while searching for my own Being. It gave me the opportunity to reveal their authentic selves, to make their voices heard, and stories told through my writing. I hope they will be powerfully animated in their own lived experiences as well.

The Power of Place

To come to the U.S. is a long journey for international students. "Journeying on earth itself, we move in and between places" (Casey, 2009, p. 298). No matter where we are and what we do, we "are" at some place. Casey says, "To be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place" (p. xv). We are in a room, at school, under a tree, on a rock, or by a creek; we are at some place. We are in a city, a state, a country, China or the U.S., a certain piece of land. "We are beings of the between, always on the move between places" (Casey, p. xii). Our everydayness takes place in a place in one way or another, and places are something we experience (Casey). Places help us to understand our day-to-day existence, and uncover more fundamental meaning dimensions of lived life (van Manen, 2002). The change of places gives us different feelings, emotions, and

expectations. On their journey from China to the U.S, I wonder how Chinese international graduate students view the two places, one past home, and one home-to-be (Casey, 2009)? The former is filled with things that a person longs for, while the latter is absent of which. Casey describes the intenseness of such reminders of absence:

I was feeling a profound sense of emptiness, a vacuum of human affection, a suspicion that no one really cared whether I lived or died and that I had been abandoned on the windswept plains, deposited there like an indifferent, subhuman thing. (pp. 191-192)

The feelings of emptiness, vacuum of human love, and suspicion emerge due to a change of place, a displacement. It might change how a person views the outside world. I felt the same at the beginning when I came to Maryland to study: the unbearable emptiness of places, and lack of love and care from people, since I knew nobody. A seemingly simple change of place, stirred up many emotions deep inside. It was from that moment on that I started to wonder the power of a place. Casey contends that the power of a place not only determines *where* a person is, but also *how* a person is together with others (such as how I communicate and mingle with others), and even *who* we shall become together. “The ‘*how*’ and the ‘*who*’ are intimately tied to the ‘*where*,’ which gives to them a specific content and a coloration not available from any other source” (Casey, p. 23). I wonder whether this power is universal? Will I be the same *who* I am, and doing the same *how* regardless of *where* I am? What does it feel to be out of place, to be *displaced*?

Implacement vs. displacement. According to Casey (2009), “To exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place—to be implaced, however minimally or imperfectly or temporarily” (p. 13). No matter where we are, we are in a place, and human beings have been searching for places for ourselves since the very beginning. To search for a place is to seek a sense of belonging,

a sense of emplacement, and a sense of home. To be out of place is to be displaced.

Casey (2009) uses the example of the Navajo to demonstrate what displacement means. He says that one dimension of displacement is:

It represents the loss of particular places in which their lives were formerly at home. (p. 35)

To be displaced is therefore to incur both culture loss and memory loss resulting from the loss of the land itself, each being a symptom of the disorientation wrought by relocation. (p. 37)

No longer at home, Chinese international graduate students traveled a long distance across the Pacific to the U.S. to pursue their education. They are relocated, and not implaced. However, “Just as every place is encultured, every culture is implaced... Culture is almost literally in the land” (Casey, p. 31& 36). Away from homeland is away from one’s culture. Perhaps as a result, Chinese international graduate students have lost a sense of their culture, memories of the motherland, and their at-homeness. They are displaced. They are in a land where they have to build or rebuild their cultures and memories, by engaging, interacting, and connecting with the new land, to build places for dwelling: for repeated return and for familiarity (Casey, 2009). Besides culture and memory loss, what are Chinese international graduate students encountering?

Displacement—Desolation and isolation. When one gets displaced from one landscape to another, “One risks falling into a state of desolation” (Casey, 2009, p. 194). Everything feels different after having departed from the familiar place, “prototypically a home-place” (Casey, p. 194). I wonder whether Chinese international graduate students fall into a state of desolation? The sense of desolation is not about the barrenness, vastness, impenetrability, and isolation of the landscape as Casey depicts. Rather, it is more about a feeling of isolation, a psychological effect. How does that isolation take

place? Do Chinese students initiate the isolation? From which aspects are they isolated?

Casey states:

The more I feel myself to be isolated (not only geographically but also socially, culturally, linguistically, etc.), the more I perceive these surroundings to be themselves desolate, the more I will feel isolated in various ways. And if I am displaced at the same time—as is often the case—any escape from this circle of the desolate-isolated self will be only that much more difficult to achieve, leaving the entrapped self discouraged and disconsolate. (p. 197)

It is a circle, yet a vicious one: once one gets displaced, one might feel desolate; once desolate, isolated. I wonder whether Chinese international graduate students experience this circle? Are they trapped in this circle and cannot escape? What can be done or what can they do to escape?

Dwelling

Heidegger concedes in *Building Dwelling Thinking* that *dwelling, wohnen*, means “to settle a piece of land, work it by farming, mining, or viticulture, and build a home on it” (2008a, p. 345). Therefore, my effort to study the sense of home and longing for home for Chinese international graduate students is to study the phenomenon of dwelling. But what exactly is dwelling? What is the significance of studying it? Does it contribute to the understanding of the fundamental question, the question of Being?

“To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell” (Heidegger, 2008a, p. 349). Studying dwelling is essential to studying human beings. Heidegger states, “On the earth” already means “under the sky.” Both of these also mean “remaining before the divinities” and include a “belonging to men’s [sic] being with one another” (p. 351). Hence, to dwell is actually to connect the elements of beings together, to bring the fourfold together into a unity and oneness: earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Dwelling, “as the *basic character* of Being,” is inherently part of the Chinese

international graduate students' experience (Heidegger, p. 362). To study their dwelling is to study their being, i.e., possibilities of who they want to be and who they might become. Heidegger states:

Dwelling (*Wohnen* in German) means to reside or stay, to dwell at peace, to be content; it is related to words that mean to grow accustomed to, or feel at home in, a place. It is also tied to the German word for 'delight', *Wonne*. (p. 345)

To dwell does not mean simply to dwell physically on a piece of land; it means to dwell with contentment, at peace, and in delight, being happy. It means to feel at home. I wonder whether Chinese international students feel at home in the country wherein they dwell? If they do not feel at home, does it mean that they are homeless in a sense?

Homelessness. We move between and among places. We might stay in a place after the previous move, or we might continue moving and searching for a place wherein we feel comfortable. Even after we physically "settle down" in one particular place, it takes time to search for the place in our heart. As we move, we are actually exploring whether we can fit into the place we are currently in, or whether the place fits the standards that we have for an "ideal" place. So we continue to move, to explore, until the two sides match, or until we have to stop moving due to various reasons. Casey (2009) observes:

When we are moving among places in an exploratory manner, we are acutely aware of not having a place to be; however efficient and successful our voyaging may be and however many places we discover, we remain essentially homeless. For we are then between shores and between destinations, *somewhere else* than home, not "settled in." (p. 121)

What exactly does it mean not having a place to be? Aren't we moving among and between places? What is the meaning of a home? At what point can we call a place home? Casey says, "We can feel at home right away in certain built places, while in other

such places a lifetime of residence will not lead to any comparable sense of at-homeness” (2009, p. 179). I wonder how many Chinese international graduate students can feel at home right away after they come to the U.S? How many of them still feel homeless after being here for quite a while? What does it feel like to be homeless?

Homecoming. There are many displacements in life, among which “The most dangerous displacement is doubtless that from the homeland” (Casey, 2009, p. 302). Chinese students are displaced from their homeland, but it is by choice as compared to the Navajos and African Americans in history who were forced to move from time to time. Those students still have an option to return, either for a temporary visit or long-term residing, to be familiar with the familiarities of home again, and to be “re-placed” (Casey, p. 291). Nevertheless, as Casey asks, “What is it to return home? Can we return at all? Is home ever the same place it was (in either sense of ever)? Or is it true that ‘you can’t go home again’” (p. 298)?

“The longing for return to a home-place and a home-territory is the curious converse of the circumstance of many journeys” (Casey, 2009, p. 308). We all long for that home-place in our hearts. To go back home to visit each year not only has become a routine, a responsibility, but more an emotional need and a desire. To go home is not only to visit those who reside in that particular place, but also to refresh our past and memories in that land, as we keep the past in mind (Casey, 2009). It is to revisit our past, to re-reveal our emotional attachments to the past, to the land we used to reside in. But I wonder what is so special of our past? Tuan (1977) says: “Familiarity is a characteristic of the past. The home provides an image of the past. Moreover in an ideal sense home lies at the center of one’s life, and center (we have seen) connotes origin and beginning”

(pp. 127-128). Once the past has passed, are we indeed still familiar with it? Is it not the fact that the past can never take place again? Isn't it why it is called the "past," meaning "done with, over"? When we go back to the past, to that particular land, are we expecting everything to be the same? Emily Dickinson (1960) expresses herself in *I Years Had Been from Home*,

I years had been from home,
And now, before the door,
I dared not open, lest a face
I never saw before

Stare vacant into mine
And ask my business there.
My business, --just a life I left,
Was such still dwelling there? (p. 357)

Is the past still dwelling there? Is a left life still dwelling there? Why are we so eager to open the door to the past yet hesitate, and are afraid and anxious at the same time? We are so anxious about the past that we remembered and re-imagined, but in the meanwhile, we are concerned that our business is only a life left, a life that no longer has anything to do with the particular place that we were attached to. We are scared but yet ready to face the cruel reality that we no longer belong to that place, nor that place to us. Regardless of our left life there, we still long to go home, as if nothing had ever changed.

Going home is a mixed feeling for me. I am between excited and somewhat disappointed, excited because I am finally back to the land that I miss and dream about day and night, disappointed because it is different from what I had remembered and imagined. It, indeed, is no longer my past, or the same that I experienced before. Casey (2009) says, "Having to go home is having to go back to where you will be taken in—in a place in which you can move about with ease and familiarity" (p. 300). What does it feel

like to be taken in? How is it possible that I do not remember the feeling of being “taken in”? Where did my ease and familiarity go? Being at an airport in China, in the midst of being at home, I feel that I am a stranger instead of a host. It feels that it is the first time that I have come to this piece of land, as if I never knew this place before, ironically a land that I call it home. Casey (2009) shares a similar momentum:

In homecoming I can find myself in the extraordinary situation where I return to a place which I can be said to know *for the first time*, even though in fact I have been there before and still retain intact memories of my earlier experiences there. (p. 293)

He continues to write that it is normal to have the “as if” feelings: we go home as if it is our first time to know that place, and we homestead as if we had known that place before, even though we had never been there. I wonder why I have this feeling of “as if”? Is this not the place that I have been dreaming of while studying in the U.S.? Is this not the place that raised me and on which I have many memories? Are Chinese international graduate students having the “as if” feelings?

No matter whether I am in the U.S. or China, I am constantly thinking about the land that I am not currently in and comparing the two places to see how much I am connected to each and how much they have influenced and changed me. It seems that each land has become something in my dream: waking up in China I find myself surprised not to be in the U.S., while in the U.S. I wonder whether I have ever returned to China. I wonder if Chinese international graduate students encounter similar scenarios?

Van Manen (2002) says, “To do phenomenological research is to question something phenomenologically and, also, to be addressed by the question of what something is ‘really’ like. What is the nature of this lived experience?” (p. 42) My phenomenological question is: **What are the lived experiences of Chinese**

international graduate students living in the United States? It helps me to obtain a better understanding of not only Chinese students, but also human beings in general, as phenomenological research is “to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (van Manen, 2002, p. 5).

The Methodology of Phenomenology

Van Manen’s (2002) six research activities guided my phenomenological research to explore the nature and meaning of being Chinese international graduate students:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
 2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
 3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
 4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
 5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
 6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.
- (pp. 30-31)

Turning to the Phenomenon

Oftentimes when I think about my research participants—Chinese international graduate students, I cannot help reflecting on my own experiences, because “my own experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one’s else are” (van Manen, 2002, p. 54). I consider myself one of them and I feel that there is a connection that can bind me and other Chinese graduate students to help me gain a better understanding of their lived experiences. “Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research” (van Manen, 2002, p. 36). So what is “lived experience?” Dilthey (1985) contends:

A lived experience is a distinctive and characteristic mode in which reality is there-for-me. A lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have a reflexive awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. Only in thought does it become objective. (p. 223)

In turning to the phenomenon, I started with some typical and interesting encounters that I have had during my stay in the U.S, such as trivialities in daily life that we take for granted. Although it is my own experience, from a phenomenologist's perspective, "One's own experiences are also the possible experiences of others" (van Manen, 2002, p. 54). Starting with my own personal experience helps to orient myself to the phenomenon and all the other stages of my phenomenological research. Van Manen states, "It is to the extent that *my* experiences could be *our* experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings" (p. 57). In phenomenological research, it is easy to notice that the author uses "I" or the "we" form, which shows that:

That author recognizes both that one's own experiences are the possible experiences of others and also that the experiences of others are the possible experiences of oneself. Phenomenology always addresses any phenomenon as a *possible human experience*. It is in this sense that phenomenological descriptions have a universal (intersubjective) character. (van Manen, 2002, p. 58)

Phenomenology not only speaks for "I" or "we", but it has the potential to speak for him, her, and the human experience in general. That's the beauty of phenomenology, which is to connect us together as human beings.

Merleau-Ponty (1962/1989) says, "Phenomenology is the study of essences" (p. vii). Here the word "essence" does not mean the mysterious discovery or some ultimate core or residue of meaning; instead, the term "essence" may be understood as "a linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon" (van Manen, 2002, p. 39). A good description that constitutes the essence of a phenomenon reveals the structure of the phenomenon to us so that we can grasp the nature and significance of the phenomenon in an unseen way. To study the essential nature of a phenomenon is to study a certain being

in the world, by asking the “what is it like” question (van Manen, 2002, p. 42). Therefore, at the end of my turning to the phenomenon, I asked the question: **What is it like to be Chinese international graduate students living in the United States?**

Investigating the Phenomenon

In order to grasp the essential nature of a phenomenon, we need to “search everywhere in the lifeworld for lived-experience material that, upon reflective examination, might yield something of its fundamental nature” (van Manen, 2002, p. 53). Therefore, to investigate a phenomenon is to “gather” or “collect” lived experience materials of different forms in various approaches (van Manen, 2002). In order to arrive at a better understanding of what it is like to be a Chinese international graduate student in the U.S., I first started with my own personal life experiences, as I am one of those Chinese students, and my experience is the most immediately accessible to me. However, to do phenomenology is not to do autobiography; I uncover aspects of my experience only to serve as a starting point for uncovering the experience of others. Therefore, I described my experiences as much as possible in experiential terms, focusing on my particular situation of being in the U.S.: longing for home and connection with people. I tried to describe my experience directly rather than “offering casual explanations or interpretative generalizations of my experience,” so that I do not speak for Chinese international students; rather I let them speak for themselves (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989, vii). I also gathered stories that I heard from friends; I read literature on experiences of international students, immigrants, refugees, and diasporas in general; and I used various means to gain a deeper understanding of what it might be like to be an international student.

Tracing the etymological sources. When we study a phenomenon, sometimes

the word has lost its original meaning; therefore, it is necessary that I trace the etymological sources of the words that are connected to my phenomenon, such as the word “foreign,” which means “outside” “out of the door,” which brings up the discussion of “door,” “insider” and “outsider;” “hypocrisy,” which means “play a part, pretend,” which provokes the thought on “play” and “genuine,” hence leading to the discussion of “care.” For instance, the term “care” “possesses the dual meaning of worries, trouble, anxiety, lament on the one side, and charitableness, love, attentiveness, benefice on the other side” (van Manen, 1990, p. 58). The term “care” is relevant to my phenomenon in two respects. First, I connect it to the greeting “How are you?” because I start to question whether we use it due to its ritualization, or because the person who asks that question “feels concern or interest,” i.e. genuine and deep care. Second, one of the most important reasons that drives me to do research on Chinese international graduate students is because I care; I care about their well-being deeply in my heart. Van Manen (2002) states:

Retrieving or recalling the essence of caring is not a matter of simple etymological analysis or explication of the usage of the word. Rather, it is the reconstruction of a way of life: a willingness to live the language of our lives more deeply, to become more truly who we are when we refer to ourselves. (p. 59)

Etymology, indeed, helps to further open up my phenomenon by tracing origins of words, revealing and unfolding the original meaning that has been lost. But it is only a means for us to begin to reconstruct our lives and to start to care for others and ourselves in a genuine and meaningful way.

Using idiomatic phrases. Van Manen (2002) writes, “Idiomatic phrases largely proceed phenomenologically: they are born out of lived experience” (p. 60). I used quite

a number of idiomatic phrases. In China, we consider that idiomatic phrases are imbedded with wisdom, because they are accumulated from everyday life or passed on from generation to generation. The previous sentence happens to be an idiomatic phrase without my notice. Idioms express ideas in a unique and accessible way. What is interesting in my writing is that I used idiomatic phrases both in English and Chinese. As Gadamer (1975/2004) claims, there is no “right” or perfect word for what we intend to express in a foreign language. I turned to the original words in Chinese, not to mention some idiomatic phrases that cannot be conveyed unless expressed in my original Chinese language, combined with the historical and cultural interpretation. However, I did not blindly collect a multitude of idiomatic phrases that are associated with the phenomenon in some way; instead, I chose those ones that possess the interpretive significance for the actual phenomenological description (van Manen, 1990).

Borrowing other’s words. There is a two-fold meaning of “borrowing” words from others: both from other individuals’ experiences and experiential descriptions in literature. Why are we borrowing others’ experiences? We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves (van Manen, 2002). By utilizing and studying others’ experiences, we come to reflect on both our own experiences and the experiences of others in order to “better understand the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience” (van Manen, 2002, p. 62). The goal of phenomenological research is not to simply report on how something is seen from our so-called informants’ perspectives, views, or vantage points; rather, we need to achieve the deeper goal, which is always the thrust of phenomenological research, to ask the question of, “What is the

nature of a phenomenon as an essentially human experience?” (van Manen, 2002, p. 62). The experience of others definitely helps me to better understand the nature of being a Chinese international graduate student in the U.S.

The second form of “borrowing” is from texts in literature, including but not limited to novels and poems. Novels enable us to experience life situations, feelings, emotions, and events that we would not normally experience (van Manen, 2002). Sometimes novels create a perfect connection between the stories and our real lives, for we might feel we are those protagonists in one way or another, only in a different time and historical contexts. Dilthey (1893/1985) writes, “Poetry is the representation and expression of life. It expresses lived experience and represents the external reality of life” (p. 237). Poetry is an ideal form to express the lived experience and the world. Van Manen (2002) also says, “Poetry is a beautiful and artistic form to express the most intense feelings in the most intense form” (p. 70). The conciseness, sharpness, and depth of poetry express the writer in his/her fullest extent. I could not help myself nodding and saying, yes, to those verses while reading them, as those are exactly what I wanted to express, however did not know how. Therefore, literature and poetry greatly contribute to the understanding and expressing “how” I feel.

Interviewing (the personal life story).

In hermeneutic phenomenological human science the interview serves very specific purposes: (1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience. (van Manen, 2002, p. 66)

In phenomenological research, the interview is rather a conversation between the researcher and the participants. We often say that we conduct interviews or conversations

with our participants. But do we indeed “conduct” conversations? “The more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 385). Conduct, means to “guide, lead, direct, manage, or to bring together” (Simpson and Weiner, 1989). A conductor leads a symphony, a tour guide guides a tour, and a director directs a film. To conduct means to use oneself to influence something, both in process and with outcome, which lose the genuineness in things themselves. To conduct means to anticipate something. If a conversation needs to be conducted, we have to question the genuineness of this conversation. Can a genuine conversation even be conducted? Therefore, it is more correct to say that “we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it” rather than conducting it (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 385). “Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding” (Gadamer, p. 387). It means each person in the conversation opens him/herself to the other, truly accepts that person’s view as valid and transposes him/herself into the other so that not only he or she is understanding the particular individual but also what that person says. To have conversations with my participants is to understand not only them but also what they are trying to say and express. But, “No one knows in advance what will ‘come out’ of a conversation” (Gadamer, p. 385). We let a conversation flow. But how do I know when the end of a conversation is reached? Bollnow (1982) describes that a good conversation tends to end in this way: “It finally lapses into silence, in the hope that it will be taken up again later and yet with a sense of satisfaction that the truth has been felt to be in it” (p. 45). When a conversation gradually diminishes into a series of pauses, more and even longer pauses, eventually silence, we will know that something is fulfilled. The silence is the sign that we know that we have achieved and reached something--“no empty silence,

but a fulfilled silence” (Bollnow, p. 46).

Reflecting on the Essential Themes

According to van Manen (2002), “The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something” (p. 77). The task of phenomenological reflection is both easy and difficult: easy because we all constantly try to see the meaning of a phenomenon everyday; difficult because it is often a laborious process that involves reflectively organizing, clarifying, and making explicit the structure of the meaning of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990). But, “The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional”, that is why we do not use a single sentence to plainly describe that the meaning of some phenomenon is something, as it is never that easy; rather it is multi-dimensional and multi-layered (van Manen, p. 78). That is why human science meaning can only be communicated textually—through organized narratives or prose. Therefore, in order to grasp the meaning of the text is first to understand the phenomenon in the text in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes (van Manen, 2002).

What is a theme? In literature, “theme” refers to “an element (motif, formula or device) which occurs frequently in the text” (van Manen, 2002, p. 78). A theme is a form of capturing significant aspects of the phenomenon one tries to understand. There may be many themes in the whole text of the studied phenomenon. Van Manen (2002) says, “Phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of *experiences*” (p. 79). So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, which are the experiential structures that make up the experience. Nevertheless, phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; rather they are “the stars that make up the universe of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can

navigate and explore such universes” (van Manen, 2002, p. 90).

Van Manen (2002) suggests three approaches towards uncovering the thematic aspects of a phenomenon in some text: 1) the wholistic or sententious approach; 2) the selective or highlighting approach; 3) the detailed or line-by-line approach. In the wholistic reading approach, we attend to the text as a whole and ask what are the sententious phrases that may capture the fundamental meaning of the text as a whole? Then we try to formulate such phrase(s) to express the meaning. In the selective reading approach, we tend to listen or read a text several times and tend to highlight, circle, and underline those statements or phrases that seem essential to the revealing of the phenomenon that we described. In the detailed reading approach, we read every single sentence or sentence cluster and figure out what the particular sentence reveals about the phenomenon. Van Manen also indicates that we can glean some incidental or essential themes from artistic sources, interpretation through conversations, collaborative discussions or hermeneutic conversations, and lifeworld existentials.

Van Manen (2001) notes that there are four fundamental existentials helpful for hermeneutic theme reflection: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality). As noted earlier in this chapter, those four existentials are fundamental to the lived experience of Chinese international graduate students as well, as they move from the familiar home environment to a foreign land. They straddle between disparate cultures as well time and space, to find their beings in the world, not only with themselves but also with others. But such thematizing and reflection are not easy as they involve a process of text crafting, an activity of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 2002).

Describing The Phenomenon through The Art of Writing and Rewriting

“Hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity” (van Manen, 2002, p. 7). It is an activity of writing and rewriting, which means that writing does not enter the research process only as a final step or stage. That means that a person who is doing phenomenological research needs to fall in love with writing, as writing and rewriting are endless processes. To write is to open a space where one can be oneself. To write is to grant one sufficient time to express oneself. To write is to discover and rediscover oneself. Writing cannot be separated from any part of the writer’s life. It is to express oneself fully and completely. It is to make meaning out of one’s experience (Anzaldúa, 1999). It is to find the most appropriate and accurate language to express oneself, especially when a person writes in a language that is not one’s own.

Writing is inspirational. There are times that I write nothing after staring at my computer screen for quite a while. My mind is everywhere, yet ends up nowhere; there are also times that thoughts simply flow naturally through my fingers and become texts with no stumbling. I wonder whether am I writing, or am I simply producing words, a text even, as van Manen (2005) describes?

Writing goes beyond both the writer and the specifically addressed readers; rather, it is actually a platform in public where everyone can find his/her own place:

In actual fact, writing is central to the hermeneutical phenomenon insofar as its detachment both from the writer or author and from a specifically addressed recipient or reader gives it a life of its own. What is fixed in writing has raised itself into a public sphere of meaning in which everyone who can read has an equal share. (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 393)

Therefore, my writing does not specifically target Chinese international graduate students or people in education, but also tries to achieve the goal that everyone and anyone who gets a chance to read it might take something away from it. It is through finding a

connection with the words of others, and by “having a present involvement” in what is written, i.e. to interpret it so that it can make sense, that we can apply it to ourselves (Gadamer, p. 393).

Gadamer (1975/2004) says, “Writing is self-alienation” (p. 392). When I write, it feels like that I live in another world, a world only filled with writing and thinking, nothing else. It is like “there are two selves in me: an inner self and an outer self” (van Manen, 2005, p. 2). The outer self dwells in the physical space that I am conducting my writing, and the inner self has been drawn into and dwells in the “writerly” space that the words open up, the *textorium*, the world of the text (van Manen, 2005). Van Manen (2005) echoes Gadamer, “To write is a solitary experience, a solitary and self-forgetful submersion in textual reality” (p. 3). I traverse back and forth between the two worlds. In the writing world, I can be myself, the authentic me, with no concern about the potential response from a conversation partner as it would be in a verbal conversation. Before it becomes a conversation between a potential reader and me, writing is a conversation with myself. The conversation back and forth helped me to ask more questions and also prepared me with the kinds of questions that I asked my participants.

In writing, I detach myself from the mundane world, yet I still live in that world to get inspired. I write, I take a break, I take a peek outside of the window; my gaze stays on a tree which is wildly waving in the wintry wind, my ears are wide open seemingly to search for some voice that I can fetch and hold onto, and my heart is peaceful as a lake surface with no ripples.

Writing helps to ask questions. Every questioning is a seeking (Heidegger, 1972/2008). Questioning helps me to think, analyze, justify, and rationalize. It guides me

to keep track of my questioning, such as why I prefer certain questions to others? What is the point of asking those questions? Where are those questions going to lead me? Heidegger (1971) states, “Questioning is the piety of thinking. ‘Piety’ is meant here in the ancient sense: obedient, or submissive, and in this case submitting to what thinking has to think about” (p. 72). Questioning follows the direction of thinking. To ask questions is to think. A person who does not know how to ask questions does not know how to think. We think and ask questions in order to understand the nature of something, which we accomplish through our writing and rewriting project. Phenomenology is a philosophical project, and philosophical reflection is the product of wonder (van Manen, 2005). Phenomenology starts with our own wonder, and we also need to end in a way that it induces the wonder of others by engaging them with our writings (van Manen, 1997). My phenomenological writing serves to lead the way to human understanding, and I must engage with my readers and lead them to wonder through my writing.

Maintaining A Strong and Oriented Pedagogical Relation

Van Manen (2002) states, “The fundamental orientation in human sciences is pedagogic” (p. 1) and “all theory and research were meant to orient us to pedagogy in our relations with children” (p. 135). Phenomenological study is to show what it is like to have certain kinds of experiences through descriptions. “Description would always seem to be animated by a certain interest” (van Manen, 2002, p. 136). What is this certain interest? It is interest in the population that we are studying, in order to arrive at a better pedagogic understanding of their experiences in order to make changes that will improve ways in which the phenomenon is lived. To have a pedagogic orientation does not mean that we have to be abstract or our texts or theories should be cut off from everyday lifeworld; rather they should be more concrete in caring for those who we are researching

(van Manen, 2002). To have a pedagogic orientation does not mean that we have to conform to the current narrow concept of “pedagogy”: the act of teaching. Rather, to have a pedagogic orientation means that we want to know what we might do to enhance our way of being with the phenomenon and for those for whom we are responsible.

Balancing the Parts and Whole

As we write or speak about a particular experience, a concrete practice, we need to always approach the method contextually, while keeping the fundamental question in view (van Manen, 2002). As I write, the themes emerge, and I have to make sure that all my themes are relevant aspects of my fundamental research question: What are the lived experiences of Chinese international graduate students living in the United States? What is the meaning and significance of this experience? I need to go back and forth to check the relation between each theme and the whole of my research intentions to make sure that a bigger picture of this particular human experience is revealed. However, to reveal and to “present” the study of one particular experience is not simply to put forward the endless conversation transcripts or fragments of them; rather, to reveal the experience and let the experience speak for those participants is more an interpretive and narrative task (van Manen, 2002).

“Human science is a *systematic* study of human experience” (van Manen, 2002, p. 168). It means that I need to keep the evolving part-whole relation of my study in mind at all times. It means that we do not take a stab of meaning here, then meaning there, and then drift to another theme; rather, I need to persist with a theme and systematically explore its meaningful aspects. Therefore, each theme should contribute to the systematic exploration of the phenomenon, and I need to make sure that it is a quality theme to add to the whole study, rather than isolated and irrelevant conversation transcriptions or

fragments of them.

My Process of Engagement

Through drawing upon different philosophers, such as Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and Casey, I gained a deeper and better understanding of phenomenology, and from which I can unpack my phenomenon of the lived experience of Chinese international graduate students in the United States. Having read literature on international students, drawing on poems and lyrics, I feel that in a sense I am re-imagining and reliving my day-to-day life in the U.S. Phenomenology opened a door from which I can see what the experiences are for Chinese international graduate students in the U.S. To see is to explore, to discover. I am living my life as an international student from China, yet I am also imagining me living their lives as international students. What would it be like? It is this curiosity and care that led me to my exploring journeys of myself and other Chinese international students, with them and in them. I began this journey with my conversations with them.

The Participants

I conducted my study at a flagship university on the East coast in the United States, where there is a large population of Chinese international students. In order to get a large pool of students who might be interested in participating in my study, I coordinated with the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) on campus to help me recruit interested participants, in addition to my personal network.

Solicitation of participants. In order to encourage the diversity among my potential participants, hence to add richness into my study, the following areas ranged and were emphasized when soliciting participants:

- Gender (mixed)

- Age (24-35)
- Length of their stay in the United States (minimum one year of stay)
- Fields of study (arts and humanities, social sciences, and STEM field: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)
- Marital status (single, or in a relationship including married)
- Intended degree (both Master's and doctoral degree)

I recruited my participants through my own personal network and the assistance from ISSS. After I sent a recruiting email to the international student population on campus through the ISSS listserv, six people responded with interest, but they were all about 22 or 23 years old, single, all pursuing Master's degree at the University. Half of them were studying Business, one in Public Administration, one in Computer Engineering, and one in Education. Five of them were first-year Master's students who had been in the U.S. for less than a year. There was not much diversity concerning age, length of stay in the U.S, and marital status, which positioned me into a dilemma. I also posted a Facebook message on my wall to recruit students, and I received several responses. All of those who responded, except one, were from institutions from other states that required traveling, which was opposite to my intention of recruiting students from this one particular university on the East coast. Therefore, none of them became my participant. In the end, I only made one of the six students who responded to my ISSS recruiting email my participant, and all the rest of the participants were from my personal network. In total, there were seven participants, who had various length of stay in the U.S. (but at least one year), age, marital status, areas of study, and intended degree. There were about four male and three female students. They are Sun Quan, Alex, Evan, Joe, Julie, Ashley, and Poem, all of whom were introduced at the beginning of Chapter Four.

Establishing Conversations. In general, I had three conversations with three participants and two conversations with the rest of the four. I did not conduct the

conversations; rather, I let the conversation flow, because we never know what would “come out” from those conversations (Gadamer, 1975/2004).

The first conversation focused on their lived experiences on being Chinese international graduate students in general. The second conversation was on how their experiences had changed or influenced them as a person, and how they had learned and matured through the experience. A third conversation was used with participants regarding questions that need to be addressed. Although I was not “conducting” conversations, I found it helpful to have some initial questions to start my conversations with my participants, so that they could feel at ease, comfortable, and safe to share with me about their life stories. Those opening questions included, but were not limited to:

What did it feel like when you first came to the U.S.?
What is it like to be a Chinese international graduate student in the U.S.?
What drew and motivated you to come to the U.S. to study?
Did you expect any cultural differences or adaptation issues?
How do you view your experience of being a Chinese international graduate student in the U.S.?

All conversations took place from early June to late November 2013, in mutually agreed places, such somewhere quiet on campus, the court yard of my college building, my apartment, or a relatively quiet café at a slow time. All conversations were in Chinese, as it was the language with which they felt comfortable and at home. However, there were moments that my participants chose some English words or a combination of the two languages to express themselves, as sometimes we might have adopted another way of thinking as we are speaking that language (Gadamer, 1975/2004). I let all conversations flow, rather than being conducted, until they sank into a fulfilled silence, by which I got to know that it was the end of the conversations (Bollow, 1982).

After the first conversation, I asked my participants to write about their most memorable/unforgettable moments of their experiences in the United States. They were encouraged to use their imaginations and various forms to express themselves, such as metaphors, drawings, or poems, music or artworks. In addition to my requested writing, if participants already had some writings on their experiences as international students in the U.S., and were willing to share with me, they could also provide those to me, such as their journals, diaries, and blogs (See Appendix C for Reflective Writing Exercise).

Three participants did the writing activity; one participant asked me to visit his Renren account (similar to Facebook account in China), where he posted quite a few journals about his stay in the U.S.; another participant also shared with me her journals from her Qzone (a Chinese domestic social media) of the time period from July 2008 to August 2009, during which she posted about 20 journals to record her first year of stay in the U.S. The opportunity to read their writings and journals gave me a chance to sit back and reflect on my own experience and think through the first conversations I had with them, and many conversations and occasions that I encountered on a regular basis. As I was conversing with them and reading more about their deep thoughts, I felt more excited and important about my dissertation research.

Unfortunately, I was not able to gather everyone for a group conversation as I initially planned, due to everyone's busy schedule and relocation. Not long after one participant started his full time job, his wife gave birth to their first child, and his days were mostly occupied with the newborn and taking care of his wife. One participant moved back to Arizona to be with her family while finishing up her dissertation writing. Another participant became busy with conference travelling and paper writing for job

search, and could not spare time. Another participant had to travel to Philadelphia every other weekend while being occupied with his lab work during the week. So I could not find a time that everyone could get together and the group conversation did not take place.

All conversations were audiotaped, with my participants' permission. I transcribed all the conversations myself. While transcribing, I also simultaneously translated the text from Chinese into English, with confidence in myself, as I studied English/Chinese translation in College. However, as I mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, because sometimes we are not able to find the appropriate or equivalent words in another language, I simply did not translate some Chinese words and left them as they were; or there were some words that I did not know how to translate at the moment, so I went back a second or third time to try to translate as accurately as possible.

As noted earlier, van Manen (2002) suggests three approaches towards uncovering the thematic aspects of a phenomenon in some text: 1) the wholistic or sententious approach; 2) the selective or highlighting approach; 3) the detailed or line-by-line approach. In the process of thematizing, I used a combination of the three approaches to help me better understand my phenomenon. Having spent days and nights with my conversation transcripts for months, and reading my participants' journals and writings numerous times, I came to understand their experiences in a deeper and more meaningful way. The emergent themes that speak to my researched phenomenon are rendered in Chapter Four, crafted through phenomenological writing and rewriting.

CHAPTER FOUR: ORIENTING OURSELVES: BETWEEN SPACE, TIME, WORLDS, AND LANGAUGES

Being an international student in a foreign country is to experience something the same and different, old and new each day. The first task of a student is to learn; therefore, the early identity development of international students revolves around learning. However, learning for them, and for any of us, does not only reside in classrooms. Rather, it permeates outside of classrooms as well, and in our daily lives. To live and study in a foreign country is to start and navigate a different life abroad, and it is to negotiate oneself amongst unfamiliarity surrounded by strangers.

“The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something” (van Manen, 1990, p. 77). My research is to get into my participants’ lives and show the meaning of being Chinese international graduate students in the U.S. It is to draw out the meaning of that experience, and let the essence unfold. Doing such research is rather a laborious task of text crafting, which involves a process of “reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 77). This chapter unfolds the structure of the essential meaning of Chinese international graduate students in the U.S., from which we can have the opportunity to understand more fully how Chinese international graduate students orient themselves on a daily basis, as newcomers, as students, and as foreigners. Conversations and interactions with my seven participants allowed me to delve into the phenomenon and show the meaning of their lived experiences through emergent themes that reside inside these questions: How do they experience space and time differently? What is it like to be living simultaneously and metaphorically between two worlds? How

do they interpret speaking English as a foreign language while living in the Chinese language?

Meet The Participants

Before I started conversations with each participant, I asked each of them to pick a pseudo name to protect their confidentiality. They asked whether they should pick a Chinese name or an American name, and I left it up to them. To my surprise, only one person picked a Chinese name “Sun Quan” to describe himself and preserve his Chinese identity. “Sun Quan” (182-252 A.D.) was a real historic figure who was the founder of Eastern Wu during the Three-Kingdom-Era in Chinese history, and who was also a military strategist, renowned for his wisdom. The reason why the participant picked Sun Quan as his name in my dissertation research was that he hoped that he could strive to be someone like Sun Quan, a hero, and someone who can contribute to the greater society. Two participants picked English names that they had used before: Joe and Evan. They both indicated that they had English names to refer to themselves to make it easier for those who are not Chinese. For the rest of my participants, I picked the names for them since they insisted on me choosing the names for them because they did not care much about what names they were given, and they were aware that I only wanted a name for each of them to protect their confidentiality.

I had a difficult time coming up with names for my participants. I had the option to give them either Chinese or English names. The idea of giving them Chinese names occurred to me first. However, I, like my participants, was concerned that the Chinese names might be difficult to pronounce, hence the meaning of those names would be lost. This would make the act of giving them Chinese names not as meaningful as it should be.

Due to the fact that I was writing a dissertation in English in the United States, I chose to give my participants English names. I tried to come up with English names that could represent each participant well. However, I did not succeed due to my limited understanding of English names. Therefore, I only gave my participants the most popular English names that I could recall: Alex, Julie and Ashley. I gave Poem such a name because she is an avid Chinese poetry reader.

Sun Quan is a 29-year old, single, Ph.D. student in Economics, who came to the United States in 2009. I met him a few times at some events before he became my participant. Once, I ran into him in the food court on campus, and we briefly discussed our own research projects, and I told him that I was studying the lived experience of Chinese international students in the U.S. He commented that my research topic is pertinent to every international student, and that he would be very interested in being a participant if I was in need. He was the first person to offer his time and show interest in being part of my research, and he shared the following comment with me when I was talking about a sense of home, belonging, and loneliness: “There is no such a thing as feeling at home; you are never at home in this country, you are forever a visitor, a foreigner, and I think a lot of us are lonely here.” His comments reminded me of the moments that I felt lonely and not belonging in the U.S., and it was also at that moment that I would seriously consider his offer to be part of my research. Compared to China, Sun Quan thinks that the U.S. has a longer modernization development period, referencing its longer history of modern economics, and that is why he came to the U.S.

Evan is 24 years old, pursuing a Master’s degree in Computer Science, and is in a long distance relationship with his girlfriend back in China. He came to the U.S. in

August 2012. Evan was the first person who responded to my recruiting email through the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) listserv on campus. He was very open, funny, and comfortable sharing his life with me. Evan indicated he would be willing to help me with my research no matter how long it might take. He was concerned that there might be very few people to respond, and he simply wanted to help out. After the first email interaction, I went ahead and had a brief conversation with him to explore whether he would feel comfortable sharing his experience, and that turned out to be a conversation of almost one hour. We established very good rapport and I decided to have him be one of my participants. Afterwards, many conversations followed. Evan expected many differences between the U.S. and China before he came, and he enjoys the “open and relaxing” environment of the American university, compared to the “closed and isolated” Chinese university culture. Evan is very passionate about Computer Science, and he says that he is happy as long as he can write computer programs. His father wanted him first to study Computer Science in the U.S., then work a few years, and eventually get a Master’s degree in Business Administration (MBA). But he is not sure whether he wants to follow the career route that his father planned for him. He says that he will continue to write computer programs until one day he gets tired of it; only then will he think about career changes.

Joe is 31 years old, and recently finished his doctoral degree in Electrical Engineering in July 2013 after five years of study. Due to the switching of his advisor, hence research project, and sporadic lack of funding during the course, the program took him longer than he expected. During the program, he met his now wife, who also was a student here at the same university at that time. They got married in 2011 after a long

distance relationship, since she once moved to another state to pursue a Master's degree. Three major events took place in 2013 for Joe: in addition to the completion of his doctoral program, he started a full-time job in August and began his fatherhood when his son was born in December:

My son brought me so many changes. Since my wife's pregnancy, I started to realize how difficult it is to raise a child. I also realize how much I love my mother. I think only after we have children ourselves do we understand the care and concern from parents, and the meaning of being parents. Look at me, I worry about "this and that" of his life, and I even thought about how to educate him or what kind of person he would become before he was born! It was quite interesting.

Julie is a 29-year old female, who came to the U.S. in 2008 to pursue a doctoral degree in American Studies. The strong encouragement from her advisor in her Master's degree program motivated her to come to the U.S. That same advisor, who also had been to the U.S. back in the 80s, recommended her to "go and see the world," and she told Julie that for a person to study the language(s) of (a) particular country(ies), it is necessary for that person to have the firsthand experience of seeing what it is like to be in that/those culture(s). Partially due to the encouragement from her advisor, Julie felt strongly compelled to come to the country on which she is doing research. Julie teaches undergraduate courses by herself at the university, although she is a teaching assistant. She told me that teaching is where her passion resides and she would like to pursue an academic career and has been applying for faculty positions. However, nothing has worked out so far, and she told me that she is lost and does not know what to do:

Maybe due to my experience here in the U.S. the longer I stay here, the more I want to quit applying for academia jobs in the U.S., because it is still hard to fit in and be part of the mainstream society. Yes, they give you the freedom of speech, but you are still marginalized.

Julie was engaged to her long-term partner when she was a participant in my research, and recently got married in August 2014. She jokes about it: “Now I am officially a dependent!” since she has to obtain medical insurance through her husband’s employment, due to the fact that she still has not secured a job and no longer received funding from the university.

Ashley, 33 years old, is married with a three-year old son, and studies TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language). She came to the U.S. in 2007 because she wanted to see the culture of the language she had been studying. She and I met about two years prior to my dissertation research; however, we never had a chance to talk to each other until one semester before the conversation, when we took a one-credit seminar course together. In that course, each of us had the opportunity to share our own research interests. Having heard my research, she said to me, “I am very interested in your research, because your research makes me reflect on my own experience; I think it is very interesting and important.” She was at a university in Iowa before, and then started a Ph.D. program in Arizona, but later she decided to come to this university to follow her current advisor and continue her Ph.D. That decision also meant that she had prolonged the status of her long distance relationship. Ever since the day that she started dating her now husband, they had not been together in the same place once. She moved back to Arizona to be with her husband and son after her dissertation proposal. Ashley plans to accommodate her family regarding living arrangements, either going back to China or staying in the U.S, all of which depends on her husband’s preference. However, it seems that she is more inclined to stay in the U.S. because it is more conducive to her husband’s career development for the reason that he had just started working full time not long ago.

Poem, 30 years old and single, studies Meteorology for her Ph.D. at the university. She came to the U.S. in 2006, purely based on a long held dream since high school—that she wanted to attend one of the most prestigious universities in China: Beijing or Tsinghua University. However, that was not fulfilled when she took the College Entrance Exam. Neither university accepted her. In order to prove that she had the capacity to attend a world-class university, she became determined to attend an overseas university, particularly in the U.S. I met her when she first came to the area in 2008, and we worked together for the Chinese Student and Scholar Association (CSSA) at the university and became friends gradually. She told me that apart from her wish to attend a world-class university, she came to the U.S. also to avoid the severe employment challenge upon college graduation in China. As she describes, “It is my own way to escape from the real world.” She is in the final stage of finishing her doctoral degree, yet she still feels that she is not ready for the workforce, and still she does not want to face the “real world.”

Alex is a 26-year-old doctoral student in Computer Engineering, who came to the U.S. in 2011. He is in a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend who is also a Chinese international graduate student in Philadelphia. Alex also works in the same lab with participant Joe. I did not know Alex nor did he respond to my ISSS listserv recruiting email, or the wall post that I had on my Facebook account. When I was having my first conversation with Joe in his lab, we heard a key click in the door, and then came in Alex. Joe and I paused and Alex realized that it was an intended private conversation and he apologized for the interruption. We chatted a little bit and I realized that he was also an international student from China. So I asked him whether he would be interested

in being one of my research participants, and he indicated that he would be more than willing to be part of my research. Alex's background is in Bioengineering, because he had to please his parents who were both Biology professors back in China. But now he studies Computer Engineering because he has always been interested in this field. He is happy that he was able to switch his field of study, because based on his research, it is much easier to find a job in Computer Engineering compared to Bioengineering. Also, he discovered that students in Computer Engineering programs can figure out problem origins more quickly as well as find solutions during research, which further reinforced his idea of switching to Computer Engineering.

My dissertation research gave me a valuable opportunity to learn about the well-being of these seven Chinese international graduate students and to listen to their stories of experiences. Now I use myself as a speaker to make their voices heard. Hence a large audience can pay attention to international students regarding the issues and problems they encounter, and to understand better those students and ourselves as human beings in general. Van Manen (1990) writes, "*Theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand*. Theme describes an aspect of the structure of lived experience" (p. 87). The themes I unfold in this chapter revolve around space, losing one's bearings, living with anxiety, and living in-between language and culture.

Experiencing Unrestricted Space—An Environment with Fewer Frames

When I first boarded the plane to the U.S, I was very excited, kind of felt that I was going to explore the unknown new world in front of me finally, because before I was living in all kinds of frames and boxes and I was so tired of them, and couldn't wait to jump out. (Ashley)

After I came to the U.S., I think there are fewer frames/boxes for me. While I was in China, I had too many concerns whenever I wanted to do something. But here, I don't feel that restricted. (Evan)

Tiao Tiao Kuang Kuang 条条框框

It is not uncommon to see frames in our daily lives: door frames, window frames, picture frames, diploma frames, etc. One thing they have in common is to ensure the stability of the item that is being framed, hopefully not changing the structure or status. 框, *kuang* is the Chinese word for frame, which is composed of 木 *mu* and 匡 *kuang*. 木 *mu* means wood or wood material, 匡 *kuang* refers to basket made of bamboo slips in ancient times, or 框 *kuang* in ancient times; it also means to correct, to rectify. Therefore, 框 *kuang* means to use wood materials to support and correct the structure if necessary; also it means to constrain and restrict (*Chinese Online Etymology Dictionary*). Evan was experiencing the tension and release between support, restriction and freedom.

The phrase 条条框框 *tiao tiao kuang kuang*, was mentioned quite often during conversations with my participants, which I could not ignore. 条 *tiao*, means a long piece of branch from a tree or a plant, such as 柳条 *liu tiao*, a piece of willow branch, or it also means anything that is of a stick shape, such as a piece of wood or a piece of metal. Regardless of the material that the stick is made of, its function is to be used within or across the frame to further support, correct, and stabilize the frame. Later, 条条框框 *tiao tiao kuang kuang*, refers to those fixed, unchangeable rules or regulations. If we want to frame an item, such as a picture, we would rather it “stays there,” with no change. But imagine if someone feels that his/her life is being framed, fixed, unchanged due to the constraints from rules or regulations; it will not be a pleasant experience. That person is restricted within the frame and cannot go beyond. With the deprivation of freedom, persons cannot do things that they desire. Once that person gets out of that frame or box,

she/he will feel a great sense of relief and freedom. That kind of feeling is like a bird being released from a cage, a prisoner dismissed from jail. Persons can have the opportunity to breathe the fresh air, and to enjoy the numerous space that they had been dreaming of and longing for.

Compared to China, the U.S. is experienced as a place with less frames, restrictions, and constraints by many of my participants. Joe shares:

When I arrived, it was pretty late, so I did not see the outside, but when I woke up the second day, the sun shined through the gigantic door to the balcony at my apartment, and I saw the sky was crystal blue, the grass was so green, and you realized that the natural environment is very good. The air is very fresh. There is a lot of space between buildings and you feel very comfortable about it, not like in China where everything is pretty crowded.

Evan says:

It was crowded everywhere on campus back in my university in China. There is no place/space at all when it comes to midterms and finals. You have to get up extremely early to “secure” a study spot in the library. But here, you don’t have to; you can just go to library and have so much space to yourself.

The beauty of the natural environment in the U.S. takes Joe away, and he feels comfortable in such a place with much space. Evan is thrilled to experience the contrast of space and he says: “Sometimes I enjoy it so much that I stay in the library all day.” Space is one of the common discussion topics in our daily lives. We live in space. There is plenty of space for storage. The office looks spacious. Someone needs some space. But what exactly is space, and how is space culturally understood?

Space—the Celebration of Freedom

Space, from late 14th century, means ground, land, territory, and extension in three dimensions, distance between two or more points. It is a concrete, yet abstract, concept. Space is there. And space needs to be experienced. Tuan (1977), in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* states: “Space is experienced directly as having room in which

to move” (p. 12). It feels nice to have room to move, so that we can feel our breath, limbs, and movement: a symbol of being alive, a symbol of freedom. We long for space. Tuan further elaborates on space and its association/relationship with place: “Place is security. Space is freedom. We are attached to the one and long for the other... Space and place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted” (p. 4). Indeed, we long for more space, the very celebration of our own freedom, unless a person does not know what to do with the space (Ritivoi, 2002). Etymologically, *space* also means “size, bulk.” In addition to representing freedom, space also becomes a symbol of status and privilege. For instance, the space of a person’s house indicates the wealth possession of the owner; the space of one’s office entails the authority and status of a person. Space is an essential part of our daily lives pervading everywhere, and we are so used to it that we take it for granted until its deprivation, or the contrast between our previous and current spaces unfolds. Sometimes space might not mean anything to us, but sometimes it might mean the whole world, and the contrast can help us raise questions that we never asked ourselves, such as, what is the meaning of space?

Tuan (1977) utilizes one life episode of the theologian Paul Tillich to explicate the idea of space. The small town that Tillich grew up in eastern Germany was a small, protected, and self-contained world. To the young imaginative Tillich, he felt that space was narrow and restrictive. The annual family trip to the Baltic Sea provided him a chance to be immersed in the limitless horizon and unrestricted space. He felt the meaning of space by being in a spacious environment. Having felt that, he chose to escape from the small town to big cities such as Berlin whenever possible, to feel the

openness and infinity of space. He was thrilled to do so. That is how Joe felt when he first arrived in the U.S. He was blessed to feel the space around him:

My biggest feeling of (space and) the freedom is that you don't have many people around you with so much noise. You can actually quietly do things here. I did not feel that much sense of space in China. Whatever you do, there are people watching you, for example: on your daily life, eating or living... I think in China, the way you do things and your value system are constantly under the judgment and evaluation of others, regardless of whether you are willing, you hear all kinds of voices. But after my five years of stay here, I feel that here everyone is very independent, and the demonstration of that independence is that you have some certain extent of freedom as long as you don't do anything against the law. I feel here (people) are not judging you, it is just a matter of personal choice, as long as you don't intercede with other people's interests, you can do whatever you wish.

Evan also says:

I feel like that when I was in China, people would look at you with all kinds of lenses that they have, at whatever you do. But here, I can do whatever I want, maybe something crazy that I never imagined when I was in China. I could be myself here, and I feel that people are not going to be judgmental of you.

Back in China, Joe and Evan were under constant watch, evaluation, and judgment, and they had no space, no privacy, and no freedom. That is why they felt relieved in a place where no one is going to tell them what to do, or what to become. In a sense, they have gained their freedom. *Freedom*, from old English *freedom*, means emancipation, state of free will. From Joe and Evan's observations, to have free will is to be independent and have a personal choice of one's own despite of all the noises around.

Greene (1988) explicates the idea of personal freedom in *The Dialectic of Freedom*: "Personal freedom refers to self-dependence and self-determination. To be autonomous and independent: This seems to many to be the American dream" (p. 1). The American dream? I did and continue to hear about this term on a daily basis: on the news, in people's conversations, and also in my own dialogues with myself. Might it be that this is the notion of my participants' longing for space and freedom in order to achieve their

American dreams? How is the notion of American dream individualized to each of us who come here, either to pursue knowledge or to leave everything behind and emigrate permanently? Is the abundance of space the first condition required for us to fulfill this American dream? Given this space, is it guaranteed that we will fulfill our American dreams? Does space indeed guarantee autonomy and independence? To be autonomous and independent means that a person or a unit can be on his/her/its own, and that they can take care of themselves. It means that persons can choose and decide whom they want to be, rather than what they were expected to be. The self-discovery of a client in Carl Roger's (1961) psychotherapy session echoes Joe's description:

He discovers how much of his life is guided by what he thinks he *should* be, not by what he is. Often he discovers that he exists only in response to the demands of others, that he seems to have no self of his own, that he is only trying to think, to feel, and behave in the way that others believe he *ought* to think, and feel and behave. (p. 110)

Back in China, Joe was not himself, but rather someone he *should* be, and doing things that he *ought* to do. Here in the U.S., he is away from the various noises that he had encountered back in China, and he can finally be himself, and be free.

Ashley shares similar thoughts on her lived experience of being restricted into frames and boxes and deprived of freedom:

I feel that in China, when I wanted to do something, my parents would give me their opinions, although they were quite supportive of my idea of coming to the U.S. So if I suggested something pretty creative or new, they would say that maybe stability is better. I think I cared more about other people's opinions, from friends and families. But here, I know nobody, I can do whatever I want, and I just feel that I have this kind of freedom.

Ashley wanted to come to the U.S. to pursue the freedom that she had been longing for, because she felt her life had been "too constraining," and "too stable," that she had stayed in the same city for her school, college, and work, prior to coming to the

U.S. *Stability*, from Latin *stabilitatem*, means “a standing fast, firmness,” figuratively “security, steadfastness.” Stability oftentimes means contentment, with less anxiety and worry. For parents, the last thing that they want to be involved in is to worry about their children, so they prefer stability for us, such as a stable job, a trouble-free life, a foreseeable life trajectory. As exciting as it is, to go to a different country to study seems unknown and unpredictable, which brings forward instability. Instability leads to parents’ concerns and worries, that life in a new country will be rough, especially for girls, and especially for unmarried girls in the conventional way of thinking, such as the thinking from my own family, because in their opinion, no one would be taking care of me.

Similar to Carl Roger’s (1961) client, Ashley’s decisions had been highly influenced by the voices of others and she was living her life for others, rather than for herself. She was restricted by different frames, and she had no autonomy. She was not free. Finally she has the freedom to do things that she wanted, without worrying about the judgment and evaluations of others. Alex had picked Biology as his undergraduate major over his own interest in Computer Engineering only because his parents thought that it would be good for him, both of whom are Biology professors. I can relate to Ashley and Alex. I was told what to do, to say, to study, how to behave, so that I could be considered normal. I was told to avoid making myself unlikable in my society, so that I did not sully my family’s reputation. There was quite a lot of pressure on me, and I could not breathe. So when I had the chance to come to the U.S, like them, I felt I could finally breathe, not only the fresh clean air, but also the air of freedom, the air of privacy, and the air in which I can be myself. In this air, I assumed that there is no judgment, and that I could be myself.

Ashley was very frustrated over the situation back in China, and she said:

In the big environment back at home in China, you don't have a space for your privacy, you don't have space for your own freedom. You just feel that your space is constantly intruded, no matter what you do, it seems people are always interfering.

Deprivation of space, layers of constraint, lack of freedom, and constantly intruded privacy propelled her to get out of the country that was too suffocating and oppressive for her, and she was dying to escape to a place where she could “pursue herself and see the outside world.” However, she had been concerned about outside voices, and she had been pulled back and never had the full courage to do so, until one day the need to be with her partner triggered her to take action and start her journey to the U.S. After she arrived here, Ashley still could not accept the fact that she had arrived in the U.S, where she felt as if she were in the movies, where she was thrilled to see the crystal blue sky, where she felt that “I don't feel that kind of constraint anymore.”

Away from different voices, away from many restrictions, my participants came to the freedom that they had longed for: freedom from parental and peer pressure, freedom from voices around them, freedom from the social structure and context in which they felt constrained. They saw the U.S. as a land of freedom of choices: what to study, how to behave, how to interpret media messages, ways to practice Christianity, and more importantly, who they wanted to be. As much as my participants enjoyed and fully desired to exercise their freedom, they also felt a sense of restriction as well. This restriction came from language challenges, not understanding American culture, and other barriers due to not fitting into American society. In a sense, freedom was there; in another, “Freedom is far away from real life” (Alex). In the midst of feeling not

completely free while in the land of freedom and space, my participants learned to navigate.

Space is given; privacy is appreciated. With the new space, Joe felt relaxed, renewed, and recharged, and that “I can do many things with this kind of space, and I am starting a brand new life here.” What are the many things that those students can do here? And how does “the brand new life” unfold in this complexly new and different country for them? Is the space indeed a good or a bad thing? Casey (2009) states, “With the freedom to change places, comes the danger of getting lost” (p. xii). In the transition of moving from China to the U.S., given the space that they had been longing for, do those Chinese international graduate students know how to get around in the tremendous space? Will they be lost? Will they manage to find their way? In the escape to freedom, challenges also present themselves and disrupt freedom to be in the midst of finding one’s place.

Losing One’s Bearings

I could not find my place, just like that it is difficult for me to write a piece that is organized and with a central idea, my current life has no center, let alone being organized. (Julie, Journal of January 2009)

The whole time difference thing just feels weird, you went to sleep during the day due to jet lag, and when you woke up, I thought it was 5 or 6 am the next day, but when I looked at the watch, it was 9 pm at night the same day, but you found out that the sun was still out and bright that late, maybe due to the location of Georgia. At that moment, you just felt that everything and the whole world are messed up due to the time difference, and I could no longer fall asleep that night. (Poem)

“To be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place” (Casey, 2009, p. xv). We, human beings, are in constant search of place. As Julie indicates, sometimes it is not so easy to find one’s place, and we might end up having no place, or being/feeling *placeless*. To be placeless is to be “*homeless*” indeed:

Not only in the literal sense of having no permanently sheltering structure but also as being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world. (Casey, 2009, p. xv)

To find one's place is to get oriented. To not find one's place is to be disoriented, which possibly is caused by the different place and the different time that is associated with it.

“Space and time are the foundation of human identity and perception. We can never have a perception that does not have each of these elements in it” (O'Donohue, 1997, p. 225).

Despite our previous knowledge that time might be different when we go to a different place, we feel weird about the time change, as if the time difference attacked us with no notice. Time difference makes some of us feel lost and disoriented. *Disorient*, from French *désorienter*, is composed of *dés* and *orienter*. *Dés* means apart, away, and in a different direction; *Orient*, means east, or the East, face the East, or take one's bearings. Altogether *désorienter* means to be away from the East, and “cause to lose one's bearing.” Coming to the U.S from China is indeed a journey coming to the West, away from the East. It can be a journey where one loses his/her bearings.

Where Am I?—To Come to A Different Place Is to Come to A Different Time

Casey (2009) states that space cannot be held apart from time in the actual practice of navigation. When one is moving over a spatial expanse at sea, time must be continually invoked. He writes, “In the case of longitude, space is *equivalent* to time” (p. 4). Indeed, the time difference (by minutes and seconds) between the local and Greenwich times can help a person locate the longitude of one's position at sea. Hence, the difference in time is equivalent to the difference in longitude and space, and vice versa. To come to a new space is also to come to a new time, and a new time causes us to lose our bearings.

Poem lost her bearings. The change of space and time makes us confused,
disoriented, and wondering *where am I?*

From time to time, a man lifts his head, sniffs, listens, considers, recognizes his position: he thinks, he sighs, and, drawing his watch from the pocket lodged against his chest, looks at the time. *Where am I?* and *What time is it?* Such are the inexhaustible questions turning from us to the world... (Caudel, 1969, p. 4)

Confusing time, strange places, and inexhaustible questions: Where am I? What time is it? What should I do next? Why am I doing this? We tend to use place and time as references to locate our body and mind. We are inclined to ask questions as a way to reflect on what we have done and what we should do in the future to encourage us to move forward as time does. Questions are not always answered, and we still wonder, ponder, yet move forward.

I run, run, and run constantly,
Somehow forgot why I departed in the first place,
I run, run, run,
I am so tired, but my footsteps cannot be stopped,
I run, run, run,
I am very scared, very panicked,
Why the surrounding scenery is so strange?
The road ahead is so perplexing?
Yet, I am still running, running (Julie, Journal of January 2009)

This poem is among the many posts that Julie had on her blog, all of which were primarily written during her first year of stay in the U.S. I very much enjoyed her writings. On one hand, they serve as a written record of her experience in the U.S., to herself as well as to people back home. They help her family know about her thoughts, experiences, and wellbeing in the U.S, such as receiving her first vehicle citation, and funny moments that she observed and experienced. On the other, her writing is her interpretation of her struggle in American society. She is running in a specific direction,

with the idea that she has a specific goal, but not aware of where she actually is going.

Rogers (1961) in *On Becoming a Person* states:

This whole train of experiencing, and the meanings that I have thus far discovered in it, seem to have launched me on a process which is both fascinating and at times a little frightening. *It seems to mean letting my experience carry me on, in a direction which appears to be forward, towards goals that I can but dimly define, as I try to understand at least the current meaning of that experience.* The sensation is that of floating with a complex stream of experience, with the fascinating possibility of trying to comprehend its ever changing complexity. (p. 277)

Being aware that their primary goal is to learn and complete their programs, do Chinese students really know where they are going, or is the goal foreseeable but dimly defined? Floating with the complex stream of experience, are they going to be carried on or carried away? Do they stop? Everyone is running towards something in life, be it short-term or long-term, willingly or involuntarily. What are the fascinating and frightening things that we experience as we run? As we run, we sometimes get lost; we sometimes do not know where we are going next; we might even encounter some intersection, not knowing which path to choose. If we are running a race, we know the route that we should be taking, but oftentimes there is no route to follow for the running in our life journey. Running in real life, running into the future, running into the unknown, yet we are still running, running... The running can be more challenging and aimless in a strange place full of strangers, a place where we feel uprooted, where non-problems become problems, where everything needs to start over, where part of us needs to be changed.

A Name Is Just A Code

These new appellations, which we ourselves cannot yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. We walk down to our seats, into a roomful of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves. (Hoffman, 1989, p. 105)

When Eva Hoffman and her sister first arrived in Canada from Poland, on their first day of school, new names were given to them to make it easier for teachers and students to pronounce: “Ewa” was changed to “Eva,” and “Alina” was changed to “Elaine.” After the names were successfully changed, “my sister and I hang our heads wordlessly under this careless baptism” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 105).

As I mentioned earlier, when I asked my participants to pick pseudo names to represent themselves in my dissertation, only three of them picked their names: Sun Quan, Evan and Joe. For the rest of the four participants, they did not care what names they would be called in my dissertation, and they all asked me to pick a name for each of them, and I did. Even Evan and Joe who picked their own names, did not think that names matter much:

I used to work at Cisco in China, an international company. Everyone had an English name, so it would be easier to communicate with the American side. Me having an English name is solely for communication convenience. Nothing else. I think a name is just a code, that it does not matter that much. So if they mispronounce my Chinese name, I wouldn't have much thought about it, nor would I be bothered. (Joe)

I think it is more convenient to have an English name, because oftentimes people cannot correctly pronounce my Chinese name, although sometimes I could not respond right away because I was like “Eh, are you calling my English name?” And if they do mispronounce it, as long as you know that they are referring to you, it is fine, and as long as they do not purposely mispronounce it. I think if I try to correct them, it is gonna be pretty hard for them (those who mispronounce my Chinese name). (Evan)

It sounds very logical to have English names for the sake of convenience. But I cannot help but ask: for whose convenience? For those who cannot correctly pronounce our names? Is a name simply a code? Would we be bothered had someone back home mispronounced our names? Wouldn't we have the urge to correct them? Since when did a

name become just a code, an identification tag, and a sign pointing to an object that happens to be a human? Why are our names called “given names?” Was it not because certain meanings and wishes are imbedded in those characters in the names, given by our families? Don’t we have feelings and attachment to our old names, or our own names? What happens to who we are when we are renamed?

A name is a person’s life-long friend unless that person voluntarily chooses to change it; a person’s name is referred to the most in a person’s daily life; a person knows his/her name better than anything else. A name is no longer a name: a name is a person; it is inseparable from one’s single essence (Hoffman, 1989), and it is who we are. So if we are changing our names for the convenience of others and to “make it easier” for them to pronounce our names, are we also trying to “make it easier” for them to accept who we are? Since when did names no longer mean what they were meant to be, but instead become an impersonal code? What is a code? A code is a cold, impersonal, and distant object. A code makes us “strangers to ourselves” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 105). That is why we could not immediately figure out that some signs and tags were referring to us. That is why it takes a long time to get used to the code.

Edward Said (1999) in *Out of Place* explains that it took him about fifty years to “Become accustomed to, or more exactly, to feel less uncomfortable with ‘Edward,’ a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said” (p. 3). Edward is his English name, and he was uncomfortable about it initially, as he did not choose it; he was given such a name by his family at a young age when his family emigrated. Yet, it still took him half a century to get used to it. No wonder Evan did not

have an idea that people were referring to him by calling his English name, since it was still freshly new, and it takes time for him to get accustomed to it.

There are many things to adopt in a new place: a new name, a new country, a new language, new friends and everything else new (Huston, 2002). A name, an essential yet seemingly smallest part in life, takes time to get used to. Unfamiliarity meets us at every turn.

Snapped Old Ties—Familiarity Rebuilding in The Midst of Unfamiliarity

Emigration took people out of traditional, accustomed environments and replanted them in strange ground, among strangers, where strange manners prevailed. The customary modes of behavior were no longer adequate, for the problems of life were new and different. With old ties snapped, men faced the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meanings of their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances. (Handlin, 1973, p. 5)

The journey of immigrants is different from the one of international students, as the circumstances of the two cannot be compared, and the timeframe is different: the former is long-term while the latter is short term, although for some it might develop into a long-term stay. But the transition from familiarity to unfamiliarity is similar, if not the same. They both encounter a world filled with old and new, with the old to be left behind, and the new to be embraced; with the familiarity moving far away, and the unfamiliarity yet to get used to.

“After the first major dislocation had occurred, the reassuring ‘there-ness’ of the familiar and of the concrete was closed to me forever” (De Courtivron, 2007, p. 32). The familiarities and the concrete are the fabrics of our lives, and they individualize for each of us. To some extent, our roots reside in those numerous trivial daily familiarities and concretes, which may have helped us with the settling of our new lives infinitely, such as family baptisms, first communions, weddings, and funerals (De Courtivron, 2007).

Familiarities are no longer *there* in the midst of unfamiliarity, which is a fact that we are all aware of, but sometimes we tend to question or deny. In the no-longer-thereness and closing of those familiarities, we hang onto the past filled with all the familiarities, since we are emotionally attached to them, as if they were an indispensable part of us.

I feel very *bushu*, 不舍 of the city where I received my Master's degree, where most of my close friendships reside, where I was so intensely emotionally attached, where everything is so familiar, and where I had so much fun. (Julie)

Bushu, 不舍, in Chinese means not wanting to let it go. All the things that she is *bushu* of are the old ties that she has with the old place, which she had to rebuild in the midst of strangeness and newness. But those ties are snapped. It means that all the items of which she has been *bushu* are deprived in the new environment.

Furnham (1997) states:

Migration (but to some extent all forms of geographic movement) involves being deprived of specific relationships or significant objects. These include family, friends and occupational status as well as a host of important physical factors ranging from food to weather patterns. The loss may be followed by grief (a stereotyped set of psychological and physiology reactions, biological in origin) and mourning (conventional bereavement behavior determined by the mores and customs of society). (p. 21)

Deprived, means “dispossessed,” which implies that something that we used to possess, own, or that which belonged to us, is no longer there. When we are deprived of something, the value of that thing manifests more and we learn to appreciate it more; we would tend to look for, create, or even fight for it. All my participants encountered this kind of deprivation of familiarity, warmth, and the feeling of being at home, although the concrete items of this deprivation vary.

Kellogg's corn flakes—Food of familiarity and comfort.

I did not know how to cook when I first got here. So the first week I bought a bunch of bread, some hot dogs/sausages, and some sauce, and lots of instant food.

I ate those for about a month. I did not like it very much, and I would never want to eat that again. I even wanted to throw up because of eating that. That just reminded me of how much I miss all the delicious food that you can eat back in China. (Evan)

I missed home very much already the first day I got to the U.S. I think it was because of the American food that I ate, it was not good, I was not eating well. I missed a home-cooked meal. And when it is Chinese New Year's time, besides missing the reunion and spending time together, I would wonder what kind of delicious food that my families are eating around the table, rice cakes, chicken, fish, and even snacks... (Poem)

Coming into a different country means to come into a world of different food, which is also one of the inevitably discussed subjects in conversations around country/culture differences. We comment on how much we like or dislike certain food, how much we miss the foods that we used to eat back home, and how the currently unfamiliar appearance of food reminds us of the familiar food that we deeply and crazily miss. Nancy Huston (2002) recalls her experience when she first went to Germany with her stepmother from Canada, that she found the foreign experience threatening, and she kept her head down throughout the meal and touched nothing served there, such as disquieting cold cuts (tongue, live pâté, head cheese), beet and cabbage salads, marinated eggs, black bread and hard, miasmatic cheeses... Having seen the fact that Huston was threatened by the foreignness of the food, the sister of Huston's stepmother drove off and came back with something for which Huston was eternally grateful: a box of Kellogg's corn flakes. Huston (2002) considered that meal must have been

The most delicious meal of her life—a banal bowlful of the all-American breakfast cereal, wolfed down at nine o'clock in the evening in a foreign kitchen, in a foreign house, in a foreign country, on the cusp of a new life in which I was going to have to survive without my mother. (pp. 59-60)

The German food offered to Huston was not awful, simply unfamiliar, strange, and foreign to her. She later also realized herself that what she was in desperate need of was

something *familiar* that reminded her of home and comforted her. Indeed, when students in my study first came to the U.S., some of them had no knowledge of cooking, and they had to acquire the skills of cooking while learning to adjust to the new foreign environment. Food is no longer what feeds us; it is also a symbol that represents familiarity, family and friends, mother, home, the aura that food brings forward, and a whole social and cultural milieu. Food is only one of the items on the list of deprivations.

Finding ways to return to familiarity.

When I first came here, there was a lack of Chinese newspapers and books, and it felt so strange and weird not to see any paper with Chinese print on it, and I was not used to it at all. I crazily wanted to read some Chinese materials, so whenever I saw a piece of paper, even in traditional Chinese, I would read it. I even read the commercial part word by word. It just felt very familiar and warm, but before I would not read traditional Chinese. (Poem)

The simplified Chinese is endorsed in Mainland China, and we do not often use the traditional Chinese characters. I was surprised to hear Poem read traditional Chinese after coming to the U.S., word by word, and even the commercial sections. She described that she had gone crazy without reading Chinese characters. She was trying her best to create an atmosphere in which she could feel back home by the simple act of reading in her own language, Chinese. In a sense, she is living simultaneously in both English and Chinese worlds, by purposefully surrounding herself with Chinese. She also misses the environment that was surrounded by people everywhere back in China. Having walked for about two hours in Athens, Georgia, Poem was shocked to find no one else but herself on the street. What a huge contrast! She was alone, and she felt lonely on an empty street, which reminded her how *renao* 热闹, (which means it is lively with its happenings and busyness everywhere) it was in China, where she was surrounded by people wherever she goes, where places were always engaged in busyness. She could not stand the significant

contrast compared to what she had in China, and wished there could be some people around her to expel her loneliness, so that she could feel at home.

We are constantly seeking what we are missing. When Evan first came to the U.S, he lived in an apartment complex where there were few Chinese, and he knew nobody. He could not stand the fact that there was no one around that he could talk to or speak Chinese with, so he decided to break the lease and move out. He was charged \$3,000 to do so. While I was talking with him, I was trying to transpose myself into his shoes: Would I do the same only to be surrounded by my fellows at such a high price? Is it worth it? When asked whether he regretted the decision to pay such a high price to move out only to be surrounded by Chinese people, he shook his head immediately and said, “Definitely not. It was totally worth it. I moved into a house where everyone is from China although in different fields, but there I feel at home.” Speaking Chinese and being with Chinese people make Evan feel at home. It is “to be at home in our tongue” so that we can “give voice accurately and fully to ourselves and our sense of the world” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 124).

Joe wanted to return to the familiarity as well, because he sees his life style differently, even boring sometimes, in the U.S. In order to fill in the boredom and emptiness that he experiences in the U.S., he specifically looks for, and interacts with Chinese individuals to establish and develop his own social circles full of Chinese people so that he can feel at home again. As mentioned in Chapter Two, home is different from a house or where we reside; rather, it is a place to which we have emotional attachment. It is possible that we can live anywhere, but not everywhere can be called home.

I do not call the place I live home because there is no family here. I am just by myself here. In the future, when my girlfriend comes to join me, it will be home. It has nothing to do with national boundaries, and the key is your family. (Alex)

Maybe that is why Joe does not feel at home, because he, along with my other participants, is far away from home. “Home is the place which I have come and to which I return” (Connelly, 1993, p. 25). It is a place where we can be ourselves, the place we always long for, and where familiarity and coziness prevail.

Regardless of the specific items of which a person is deprived and which she/he longs for, one thing in common about those items is the familiarity and connection that they had built with those items. *Familiar*, from mid-14th century English, means “intimate, very friendly, and on a family footing.” To miss something familiar is to miss something intimate, something somehow relevant to family. Food, friendships, lifestyles, all which used to be familiar, intimate, and friendly, are no longer familiar. We do indeed miss all those familiarities. But the deprivation of those familiarities revealed something emotional, more profound, and deeper that we miss even more. To miss a homemade meal is to miss the warmth and unconditional love of a parent or a family member. To miss our friendships is to miss the laughter and joy that we have together with those people. To miss a certain lifestyle is to long for that which is not available in the new environment. The absence of those familiarities reminds us how important they are to us, through which we have a better sense of who we are.

The absence of things of which we are *bushe* 不舍, regardless what they might be, such as food, friends, environment, or the whole lifestyle, constantly reminds us that we are in a new environment, that we are far away from a place that is called home, where everything used to be familiar and that familiarity possibly still exists. We would start

comparing the two worlds, one with which we are trying to familiarize ourselves increment by increment, the other at which we assume that we would always feel at home. Amongst all the unfamiliarity, we would crazily miss home as Poem described. It is a strong sense of nostalgia that is hard to expel for anyone.

In nostalgia, not only are we nostalgic over the past as *past*, but also we are nostalgic about places as well as times (Casey, 1987). Casey (1987) in *The World of Nostalgia* contends: “Beyond its memorial dimension, nostalgia is also finally a question of place” (p. 379), because it is exceedingly rare to find events or memories that are unplaced or placeless. What kind of place are we nostalgic about or over? “It is certainly a place from which we *have come* in some basic sense, and it includes not only our natal place but any place that has been of significance in our lives” (Casey, p. 363). Thus, not only is Julie nostalgic over the place she grew up, China in general, but also she is nostalgic over the specific place which has been significant in her life, the city where she received her Master’s degree, during which period of time it helped her to become who she is today.

Time and space compose the basic structures of our experiences; therefore, the *bushu* 不舍 we possess is actually our nostalgia, a missing as well as a longing, over our past experiences, over “a world, a way of life, and a mode of being-in-the-world” (Casey, 1987, p. 363) that has somewhat vanished from our lives. Nostalgia also puts us standing in front of both the old and the new worlds. It is not an uncommon sentiment for my participants or human beings in general; it indicates an awareness of the absence or deprivation of what the old world can offer, and of the result of isolation in the new world (Ritivoi, 2002). It is our attachment to our past, regardless of how small or without

significance those items are; it is a yearning to return. Etymologically, the Greek word for “return” is *nostos*, while *algos* means “suffering.” Therefore, nostalgia is “the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return,” that is, a longing for one’s own country, one’s home (Kundera, 2000, p. 5). This kind of suffering can also be understood as the pain of ignorance or of not knowing.

In the Spanish language, *añoranza* comes from the verb *añorar*, meaning to feel nostalgia, which comes from the Catalan *enyorar*, which itself derived from the Latin word *ignorare*, meaning to be unaware of, not know, not experience; or to lack or miss. For example, if a person is far away from us, we don’t know what has become of that person; and if my country is far away, and I don’t know what is happening there, because I am not physically present there to experience it, I will be nostalgic: suffering from this kind of not knowing (Kundera, 2000). All the items that my participants are *bushe* of, constantly remind them of the contrast between the past and the present, the old and the new world. In a sense, they have become nostalgic. While in nostalgia, they are in the presence of unfamiliarity and absence of familiarity, with the former being measured against the latter. The more they compare and contrast the present and the past, the more nostalgic they become and long to return. Beyond suffering, pain, and not knowing, nostalgia is an expression, a yearning for the past, and a yearning to return. It is a statement that we still retain “the capacity for attachment, the energy of desire that draws us toward the world and makes us want to live within it,” in a sense “we are always returning” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 75). But the question is: can we really return to where we came from? Will physical return equal the return to the normal state of being at home?

Will we feel *at home* again once we are home? How are we going to be recognized? Will there be a real return?

The Incomplete Return—Can We Ever Return to Where We Came from?

As an attired guest
I returned to my country, a frightened foreigner,
I first recognized
Dry rivers
The darkened mountain range
Assiduous traveler of the dawn
I later found fitting refuge
In the shadows.

My dead
Stirred.
The youngest did not know me,
My language,
My face,
Furrowed by other suns.
I was the absent relative,
The expatriate aunt,
The eccentric obsessed with justice.

Nor did I recognize
Myself among strangers.
Every step in each city
An extended farewell
Without love without ire,
Simply the perplexing and light
Absence of what does not remain
Further removed like absences
Like love affairs in strange cities
Or travelers exhausted by leisure.

I was a guest in my own country
In vain did I try to resemble
Those who had stayed
And yet,
My speech was a sharp blade,
I was unable to name flowers,
Nocturnal cacti.
I lost my country
And gained a continent
And why not the earth.
In my empty hands

I held colorful maps.
My gaze recognized
Neither blocks nor buildings,
Only the windstorm that loves and whistles
And a ghostly woman
Flying above the cityscape.
(Agosin, 1999, pp. 186-187)

The eagerness to return never ceases to haunt down any of those uprooted or in exile. For some, the return is permanent, while for some rather temporary and brief. Nevertheless, the real question is: Can we really return? Return to the places that appear in our dreams? Return to places where we spent our childhoods? Return to the supposed and assumed original familiarity? "Return to something that is no longer there, by someone who is no longer you" (De Courtviron, 2007, p. 33)? Only to find out that familiarity is no longer familiar, and that we arrive in our own home country as guests, as "iz-ed" human beings: "Americanized," "Canadianized," and so on. We no longer resemble our own people, nor do they recognize us, or speak the same language due to different life trajectories. We have to admit that "After overcoming those cruel years of being foreigner in another culture, how profoundly uneasy [it is] to become a foreigner again, this time in our own lost land" (De Courtviron, 2007, p. 33). Would we and the people still there speak the same language?

I think you might have this kind of feeling, when you go back to China to visit, when you hang out with your old good friends, you might find out that you cannot find some topics/subjects anymore, or sometimes you might find that there are some differences between the interaction style/approach between you and your friends. For example, you have some expectation from them, but they would not do it (the way you wanted), or vice versa. (Ashley)

Places that I have lived in China have changed so much, different from what I had in my memory, which makes me very sad when I go back to visit. (Evan)

Oftentimes, before students make the decision whether to stay or to return upon their academic program completion, the return is usually brief, such as for a holiday visit or a family reunion. Going home is comforting for all of us, but the journey home sometimes comes with discomfort. We intend for the comfort; however, we encounter discomfort unexpectedly. It is discomforting to figure out that a gap has opened and started to widen among friends, to realize that sometimes mutual understanding cannot be generated, to admit that we are speaking the same language, but at the same time we are not.

Moreover, it is discomforting to find out that the place has changed although we expected it to be the same, to admit that we no longer belong to our own group of people, and that we have become foreigners again in our own countries. All these discomforts originate from the fact that we have left, and we have experienced different things. Based on her experience from Poland, to Canada, then to the United States, Hoffman (1989) makes such an utterance: "Experience creates style, and style, in turn, creates a new woman" (p. 273). Each of us is in the process of creation and re-creation, regardless of where we are. Regardless whether we have left or stayed, we have become someone new, someone different from whom we used to be.

Ashley and Evan became someone new, but expected things to be the same back home as when they left, only to realize that those old friends have changed as well, and that their expectations of both the old place and the new place failed them. Not only did they realize that the old world has changed from what they had remembered, but also the new world is not exactly what they had assumed or imagined.

A New World Imagined—A Paradise Full of Gold

Before I came to the U.S., I thought that there is gold everywhere in the U.S.... that America is a very modernized society, that you can get on a conveyor from point A to point B, and I imagined that the U.S. is very future (looking), skyscrapers everywhere. And I assumed that every city is like NYC, but when I went to Georgia, it was bushes and woods everywhere. (Poem)

I thought it was perfect, a perfect heaven. I thought that it was another world, you know, as we say in China, even the moon shines brighter in America. (Ashley)

Everyone came to the U.S. with certain expectations. It is not uncommon to have expectations in life. We possess expectations about people, place, and circumstances.

Expect, from Latin *expectare/exspectare*, means, “await, look out for, desire, and hope.”

What we desire or hope does not mean that’s what the reality brings forward. Even the daily phrase such as “high expectations” or “low expectations” indicate the fact that sometimes there is a gap between expectations and reality, which also means that when difference unfolds, we might get surprised, thrilled, or even frustrated. Expectation means that we have hope over something, and hope can be realistic or unrealistic.

Ozturgut (2012) in *Chinese Students’ Perceptions of Life in the U.S.*, surveyed fifty-six Chinese students studying at a Chinese College in a Southern province about their perceptions of the U.S by asking the question: “How do you see life in America?” Those students’ perceptions touched upon aspects such as home, family, education, friendship, and food. Almost unanimously, their perceptions of the U.S. life were very positive. Americans are considered nice, open-minded, and to some extent, live in an “ideal” society. None of the students surveyed had any experience abroad. Likewise, among all of my seven participants, only Alex had been abroad before when he was in high school. Similar to the students surveyed in Ozturgut’s (2012) study, how the U.S. was presented to them, and hence, how their perceptions and expectations were formed

can be attributed to the Internet, American TV shows and movies, social media, and sometimes from people they know who have experienced living in the U.S.

To some extent, Poem and Ashley were deceived by what they had seen or heard about the U.S. prior to their arrival, which led to their enchanted image of the U.S.: the moon shines brighter, and technology has been extremely advanced in daily life.

Enchant, from old French *enchanter*, means “bewitch, charm, and cast a spell,” from Latin *incantare*, in which *in-* means “upon, into,” and *cantare*, means “to sing.” People who have a spell cast upon them usually appear in fairy tales. Once a spell is cast on someone, what guides the consciousness of that person is no longer him/herself; rather, the spell, that is, the person’s perception is either mistaken or misguided. In a sense, what Poem saw in Sci-Fi movies and what Ashley heard cast a spell on them; they lost the ability to perceive the U.S. accurately. The only way to dispel that spell is having the first hand experience in the U.S. Only then can they realize what they had assumed is not necessarily true.

Poem and Ashley were not the only ones who were enchanted by the U.S.: When Julie talked about her expectations for her field of study, American Studies, she assumed that it would be studies on how the U.S. succeeds in the global arena, and how the U.S. serves as the incubator of many innovations and accomplished corporations and enterprises. In all, she assumed it was a study on the braveness, boldness, and success of the U.S. Julie shared that many people from all over the world, including herself, understand that America is a free and democratic society, and the founding fathers built the U.S. based on those renowned principles: liberty, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness. Due to those three principles, and the successful stories that she had heard of,

such as Apple, Google, along with many others, Julie perceived the U.S. as an ideal place for the pursuit of American dreams. She imagined the U.S. to be in a certain way.

Imagine, from middle 14th Century, means “to form a mental image of,” from old French *imaginer*, means to “sculpt, carve, paint; decorate, embellish.” To imagine the U.S. is to form a mental image of the U.S., based on one’s previous knowledge about it; to imagine the U.S. is to paint or sculpt a piece of art in their mind, to one’s heart’s content; to imagine is to set one’s mind free, and let it go to whatever direction it wants. We tend to imagine what we don’t have, or what does not exist in reality. That is, imagination is usually different from reality.

Besides having the imagination of the American society in general, Ashley who is an educator, also dreamed about the happiness of the American education system. She assumed that everyone is happy, including teachers, students, and parents. Ashley believed that teachers can freely select content and pedagogy to their hearts’ content, that students have no pressure at all from schools or families, and they can choose what to learn and how to learn, with a minimal amount of homework and exams. She thought that examinations do not play a vital role in students’ assessment in the U.S. education, but that the focus is the overall development of students. There has been an emerging and urgent call in China to learn from Western education systems, especially the U.S., where it is said that the emphasis is on the all-around development of students, rather than focusing on examinations.

Those are expectations and imaginations. Gaps do exist between expectations and reality. We start to realize those gaps by the comparison of what is in our expectations

and what the reality brings forward. The moment these Chinese students set foot on the soil of the U.S., begins the process of constant comparison, contrasting, and reflection.

Gaps start to unfold a few months into their stay in the U.S. Poem started to realize that there is not gold everywhere in the U.S, nor is it paradise, but just another place on earth, where the government and people encounter problems on a daily basis. Julie realized that her area of study, American Studies, does not focus on the success of the U.S, but rather, various issues that the American society faces, pertaining to race, gender, religion, social injustice, and so on. Being a doctoral student in education and systematically studying the U.S. education systems and its various issues, Ashley realized her previous perception of U.S. education, turned out to be inaccurate, and her assumption of total happiness in education only lives in her imagination. The opportunity to receive academic training for a post-graduate degree in the U.S. also granted my participants the freedom to recognize and discuss encountering issues in their specific fields as well as to enjoy a life with fewer frames.

The first-hand experiences of the U.S. dispelled the spell that had been cast on my participants, took them out from their imaginations, and brought them to the real world, and the reality of the U.S. However, due to the lack of access to lived experiences in the U.S., the students' families and friends back home still imagined certain American lifestyles of my participants, and this is a source of tension.

A New Self Invented—Imaginations of U.S. Life from Families back Home

Since the departure there have been two Odysseus: the king as he is remembered and expected to return by his people and the warrior who lived through many experiences and adventures unknown to those who stayed at home. (Ritivoi, 2002, p. 103)

Since the time of departure from one place, there have been two selves: one that is known and remembered, and the other in a different place, with little of that experience known to people back at home. Many things took place during the ten years that Odysseus was away from Ithaca, many of which were unknown to his people, or even difficult for them to imagine how he spent his ten years away from home. Many changes can happen in a ten-year period while moving between places or being in a different place. Similarly, “Time and space have opened a breach,” between my participants and their families and friends back home (Ritivoi, 2002, p. 103). Just as my participants had certain expectations and imaginations of what life in the U.S. would be, families and friends also assumed certain ways of living in the U.S. based on the information from movies, TV shows, and word of mouth.

They assume that you live in such a free and developed country, where everything is good, and where you must be living a great life, even way beyond their imaginations. (Joe)

For those family members who imagined the U.S. to be significantly different from China, they subconsciously and naturally expected their relatives to have changed into different people, with different personalities, and having different lifestyles. The fact of living in the U.S. creates a halo for those students that they are supposed to be those who have seen the world, gained more knowledge and more personal abilities and capacities.

My families actually don't know what the U.S. is like, they think that your life is just like the American life depicted on TV, very relaxing. They solely assume that you would be different, and have changed. Maybe due to the images of American born Chinese (ABC) or overseas Chinese on TV, they expect you to be different, and do not belong to them, like someone who has so much knowledge about many things, like someone who can do many things, simply because you have come to the U.S. For example, when I was talking with my mom's sister, they were surprised to realize that the way I talk, and how I think were still the same as 3 or 4 years ago when I was still in China, but what they thought was that I should

be different, that I should live the American way, and speak the American way as well. (Joe)

“America” in Chinese is called *meiguo* 美国, which means the beautiful country.

Almost everything associated with “America” is assumed to be *mei* 美, beautiful.

Oftentimes, I am called *meiguo boshi* 美国博士, doctor from the U.S., rather than my name by acquaintances, even by some families and friends, as a way to show their admiration and respect. In the meanwhile, a distance has also been created as if I were someone different from my own people, only because I have come to a differently named country. People automatically perceive a person who has lived in the U.S. differently, as if she/he has experienced a much better life in the beautiful country called *meiguo*, where everything is supposed to be perfect, where that person has a trouble free life. People are curious and eager to know about the “exciting” happenings in the U.S.:

My friends in China were so eager to inquire about “*this and that*” of the U.S, and they automatically think that I have become somewhat special and different solely based on the fact that I made it to the U.S, and they thought that everything in the U.S. is good just as what I had imagined before coming here. Because they already imagined a perfect image of the U.S. and assumed me to be different from them, I purposely did not compliment the U.S. rather staying neutral or even saying not so good things about the U.S. because I did not want to further differentiate myself. (Ashley)

To families and friends back in China, Joe and Ashley no longer belong; rather, they have become overseas Chinese who have been quite Americanized, simply because they live in or “made it” to a different country. To non-Chinese people in the U.S, they are also portrayed and perceived differently, simply because they are foreigners, international students from China, and speak English in a different way. Straddling between the two perceptions and images that they present, which one is the true self? Are they no longer considered Chinese? What happened to their Chineseness? If they have

been Americanized, how much Americanness is there in them? Who exactly are they?

And if they were not considered to belong to people back at home, where indeed do they belong? Where is their belonging?

50/50—Who Exactly Am I?

Physically we are in American society, but your heart and everything else, the majority of them are still Chinese, or belong to China, even though you might live your whole life here in the U.S, but I still think that the imprint/trace of Chinese is more than American. Let's say that you live the rest of your life here, 30 or 40 years, the Chineseness in you is decreasing, let's say it dropped from 60 to 50 percent, so then you are 50 percent Chinese, and 50 percent American, I think that's the furthest/maximum you can go (of being American). I think there is no way that you can become a pure American or Chinese. (Ashley)

Not pure Chinese. Not pure American. Not purely an outsider, yet not an insider exactly. Lack of connection to both sides, and no belonging to either context. *Pure*, from Old English, means “unmixed, entirely, absolutely.” If something is no longer pure, it means that something else was mixed into it. Ashley considers herself no longer pure Chinese due to the fact that Americanness was “mixed into her blood;” however, she indicates that the maximum portion of Americanness within her would not exceed 50 percent. How can she predict that since she has not lived in the U.S. for about 30 or 40 years? Why specifically 50 percent, why not 51 or 49 percent? 50/50 obviously means half and half, with neither side outweighing the other. “The maximum Americanness in me cannot exceed 50 percent,” indicates Ashley’s unwillingness to let her Americanness override her Chineseness, hence to change who she is and her worldviews. Might it be a conscious effort to preserve her Chineseness? Also, will the portion of Chineseness or Americanness necessarily change according to the duration of stay in the U.S.? Would it be possible that one completely takes over while the other gradually diminishes?

The worldviews of international students changed with their length of stay in the U.S. (Yang et al., 2006). However, they are not abandoning one culture and completely absorbing another; rather, they contain elements of both cultures. It is a mixture and hybrid of both Chinese and American cultures. Ashley is a mixture of half and half. Anzaldúa (1999) in *Borderlands: La frontera* writes that people called the *muchacha* who was a woman for six months, and a man for the other six months during a year, half and half, *mita' y mita'*: “neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted” (p. 41). To be half and half means not to be only one thing or the other; rather, it has “the entry into both worlds,” and it is “the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (p. 41). It is a combination of two worlds, a hybrid. Ashley has become a hybrid creature.

I only know that the hybrid creature I've become is made up of two parts Americana, that the pastiche has lots of local color. Despite my resistance, or perhaps through its very act, I've become a partial American, a sort of resident alien. (Hoffman, 1989, p. 221)

Hoffman (1989) had her resistance, while Ashley opened up her arms to embrace the Americanness, by purposely adding something American to herself, hoping that she could be more American, wishing that she could be more and better adjusted and accepted in America. To both Hoffman and Ashley, Americanness is not something that they were told, or what they learned from text books; rather, Americanness is what they experienced in the U.S. that is different from what they were used to, different from the cultures in which they grew up. Both of their understandings are unique and valid, as they directly come from their experiences interacting with the world around them on a day-to-day basis. This difference made them recognize more of the home cultures that shaped them, such as Polish and Chinese cultures respectively, and made them realize their

difference in the new environment of the U.S. Either voluntarily or involuntarily, this difference of Americanness has been added to possibly make them a 50/50, half and half, a hybrid, and a resident alien.

I was reminded of my resident alien status again when Julie asked me what kind of form she should use to file her tax return, since she has been in the U.S. for more than five years. So have I. The form that I used to use is form 1040-NR, meaning that it is specifically for Non-Residents. Based on the federal tax regulations, for those who have lived in the U.S. for more than five years, we are no longer considered Non-Resident, rather Resident, yet still aliens. The alien concept is manifested on two aspects: one on paper, and the other psychologically and mentally, which was exactly how Ashley described it. Physically she lives in the U.S, that is, she is a resident. However, her heart and mind are somewhere else, that is, she is still an alien. I feel the same way. To feel like a resident alien is to feel that one is inside, yet still outside. It is a feeling of being an outsider while being inside. It is a feeling of being physically inside but not part of something. It is to imagine that you are the same with everyone else within it, however, to find out that there is a permanent difference between you and them. It is to feel that you can see and sense something; however, you cannot reach or touch it. It is “within the limits of my abilities and ambitions, I can go anywhere at all, and be accepted there. The only joke is that there is no there there” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 196).

To feel like a resident alien is to feel split: a split between one’s body and mind, a split between one’s past and present, and a split in linguistics and cultures. Encountering multiple layers of split, how do my participants feel? What do they quest the most? And where do they belong? Will they feel a belonging to the American culture more as they

stay longer in the U.S.? Some international graduate students in Erichsen and Bolliger's (2011) study: *Towards Understanding International Graduate Student Isolation in Traditional and Online Environments*, felt the lack of space and not belonging:

The longer I have occupied a place in the U.S. and the deeper my roots here, my psychological ties are more attached to my original culture. Now I feel neither [as] insider nor outsider. I think my identity has been negotiated. I think all of my "negotiations" have been derived from my language barrier... the U.S. is not my "place." (p. 319)

To be an outsider is to be excluded from somewhere, and an outsider wishes to be taken in. To be an insider means to be "one in possession of special information by virtue of being within some organization," and to participate in something, to be part of something. To be an outsider means that one has nothing to do with what is taking place inside, while to be an insider means that a person has something to do with "being inside." The mentality of a person changes as the status of being "outside" or "inside" changes. It is possible that one feels like an outsider being inside, or vice versa. But how does it feel being neither "outsider" nor "insider?" So where exactly do they or can they fit themselves? If the U.S. is not their "place," is China their place?

I never 100% fit in Chinese society. If I could ever 100% fit in, and live there very happily, just like a fish with plenty of water, I would not even think that I must come to the U.S. It is because in an environment like China, I don't feel that I can completely fit in, that I wanted to come to a new environment. (Ashley)

China was not her place, so Ashley chose to come to the U.S. for a change, for the passion of her dreams and the pursuit of freedom. She is not sure whether she has found a place to which she belongs in the U.S; neither do I. She came for the abundance of water that she lacked back home; however, found it rather difficult to move freely within it. The whole searching and exploring process comes along with uncertainties and anxieties.

How Do You Feel? —Being Anxious of The Way of Living in The U.S.

I was on the plane to the United States. I was so nervous to interact with Americans. First of all, language, the language that you learned previously was not that useful to you, because you need to think for a long time before you speak, figuring out how to express yourself, even for something super easy. I could not understand anything on the plane, nothing! They spoke so fast, and the only thing that I could understand was “May I have your attention please?” and all the followings I couldn’t understand. At that moment, I thought this was unbelievable, and I kept asking myself: “Did I major in English?” (Ashley)

When I was about to leave for the U.S., my grandmother, an eighty-year-old lady who had never travelled to another country asked me whether I was afraid. I clearly remembered that I burst out the answer “Afraid? Afraid of what? Of course not!” At the moment I was asked, indeed, I was not afraid at all. My excitement and eagerness to travel to a whole new country overrode my anxiety. Even if I were slightly afraid, I would still have given her the same answer to ease her worry, because as I mentioned earlier in Chapter One, she was very concerned about my survival issues in an environment filled with people with blue eyes and high noses. I considered the worries from my family including my grandmother, unnecessary and exaggerated. It turned out I was wrong. A sudden flow of nervousness struck me when I was about to land in the U.S. I almost did not know what to do in a different world. Later, my heart started beating very fast, and I was trying to figure out what words I should say to people first, what I should wear, how I should act, how I should answer greetings, how I should get myself food, etc. I completely could relate to my participants when most of them told me that they felt anxious, nervous, afraid and did not know what to do when they first came to the U.S., although the reasons they were afraid differed.

It is not abnormal to feel anxious in an environment about which we know little. Heidegger (1962) contends, “Being-in-the-world is a basic state of *Dasein*. That in the

face of which one has anxiety [das Wovor der Angst] is Being-in-the-world as such” (p. 230). Anxiety is a state of being for all humankind. Being in anxiety means that one is anxious, which is from Latin *anxius*, meaning “solicitous, uneasy, trouble in mind, causing anxiety, and troublesome.” The term/state of anxiety is ontologically connected with fear, and the two are kindred phenomena albeit difference (Heidegger, 1962). Fear comes from something that usually is threatening, while in the face of which one has anxiety, “it is nothing and nowhere,” becomes something manifest, which means that it is a phenomenon that “the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 231). What one is anxious about is already ‘there,’ and yet nowhere; it is extremely close to us that is so oppressive and stifles one’s breath, and yet it is nowhere. It can be concrete, that which we can feel and see, yet, it is abstract. Things that we are anxious about might be concrete examples in our daily life, such as food, shelter, personal safety, and so forth. It can also be something more significant in a general sense, such as life and death matters. Regardless whether the matters about which we are anxious are more concrete and trivial or more abstract, what we are indeed worried about is the *possibility* of something: “What oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it the summation of everything present-at-hand; it is rather the possibility of the ready-to-hand in general; that is to say, it is the world itself” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 231).

When my participants first came to the U.S, they brought this natural anxiety along with them to encounter and embrace the new world that was unfolding in front of them. They were anxious about an immense amount of possibilities: not being able to speak the language well, making a smooth transition from one culture to another, getting used to the food and daily practices, mentally well adjusting to the new environment,

successfully participating in and finishing their academic programs, and securing employment opportunities upon graduation. When they arrived, the new world entailed many possibilities to be explored, as well as making them anxious.

What ifs?—Can I “Handle” It on A Daily Basis?

I had more fear and anxiety than excitement over coming to the U.S. Just like starting a new job, I did not know whether I could “handle” it well, since I don’t know what the future unfolds. (Julie)

Handle, cognate with or formed similarly to Old Frisian *handelia*, means to “treat (a person) in a specified way, to negotiate, to do, and to carry out (an action).” To carry out an action entails a thorough understanding of the situation and advanced planning prior to the action, which requires time, energy, and effort. To handle something successfully is to have it under control. However, life in a foreign country can be difficult to have under control, as Julie described. There are many unknowns of the future, which lead to their self-doubt and an enormous amount of questioning and many “what if” situations.

When Joe first came to the U.S, he was afraid of almost everything:

First, I was afraid that my English was not good enough to communicate with people, and I was afraid that the person who was supposed to come pick me up had not arrived. There were so many question marks, there were many unknowns. You did not know what is gonna happen, you did not know how to take a bus, or get to your destination. I was eager to get to the “welcome house,” because that’s the only place that I knew. Everything else I did not know.

It is not uncommon that we develop a sense of anxiety upon the arrival in a new place. The place itself is not scary; rather it is the unknown that is scary. Any information prior to our arrival from schools, books, word of mouth, stories heard, or conversations with those who “had been there” seemed useless the moment we arrived. We might wonder or question why we did not anticipate this problem, why we did not think about

specific occasions and do research on them, why there was not such a brochure within which we could find answers to all possible situations. In all, everything seemed alien and strange. Our previously gathered information did not seem helpful, and seemed useless in a sense as well. We keep wondering: where has the capable me gone? Do we not have the ability to take care of daily chores? Why do we have knowledge over nothing, like an infant?

I felt so afraid and nervous, everything felt like... Before I came here, I imagined myself as an infant who knew nothing. I bet that my four- and five-year-old cousins who were born here know more than me, because it is such an extremely strange environment for me. For example, going to the postal office, shopping, checking out at the grocery store, and so on, because I never did it here before, I don't know whether it is the same as it is in China. I had to try everything for the first time, so I was very scared. (Evan)

What does feeling like an infant mean and entail? Huston (2002) says:

In a foreign country, you become a child again, in the worst sense of the word. You're infantilized, reduced to *infants*—that is, to silence; deprived of the faculty of speech. Utterly helpless and handicapped. All that's left to you are logistics, of which every least detail seems insurmountable. Where is the post office? How do pay phones work around here? What are all these coins for? You know *nothing, nothing!* (pp. 61-62)

As an infant, you don't really have the ability to express yourself, since you don't have the command of the language and speech that grown-ups utilize; hence, your voices are not heard, your needs are not understood, and your inner world not fully demonstrated. In a sense, you have a voice, but in another, your unheard voice makes you silent. For an infant, everything has to be learned from scratch. Everything seemingly easy can become a challenging task to complete, such as "how to check out at the grocery store, or how to mail a package in the postal office, how to order food in a fast food restaurant" as described by Evan. Everyday becomes a test to ourselves whether we can make a successful transition to the new environment. Among the many unknowns,

anything known is comforting and something that we look forward to, such as Joe's eagerness to be dropped off at his temporary housing "welcome house" when he first arrived, although he never set foot in that house before. Deep in his heart, that house was something that Joe knew of, where he could rest his body and mind as if he had lived there before.

Joe was afraid of whether or not he could "handle" life in the U.S. well too. He was afraid of leaving a negative impression on people due to his language and communication skills. He would try to avoid making mistakes; he would not talk, rather point, or imitate whatever others said when ordering in fast food restaurants, oftentimes not knowing what he ordered for himself. He was afraid to open his mouth, and he was afraid to be exposed as someone different, so he chose to stay silent. It is as if he were presenting himself as someone that he was not; it is as if he were trying to hide a secret from the rest of the world. He was fearful of the exposure of his secret of being different from his American peers, of speaking English with an accent, and his non-Americanness. Indeed, it is not uncommon to feel strong emotions when some secret is disclosed or made public, such as feeling a sense of betrayal, anger, disappointment, embarrassment or even shame; therefore, "We often feel fearful or anxious about the consequences of being found out" (van Manen & Levering, 1996, pp. 142-143).

When a secret is uncovered, the effect may be quite similar to the exposure of one's naked body. The exposure of a secret is like the uncovering of especially intimate and vulnerable aspects of the self. (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 143)

No one wants his/her vulnerability exposed. If we are trying to hide something, we are purposely covering it, and would rather not have it uncovered, which by default makes it a secret. In Joe's case, what is going to happen once his secret is revealed? Why

is he afraid of uncovering this long-hidden secret? What does a secret do? *Secret*, from Latin *secretus*, means to “set apart, separate, and distinguish.” Van Manen and Levering (1996) state that secrets are always relational based on the etymology. If there were one person trying to hide a secret, there would be others from whom the secret is hidden. The existence of secrets indicates a distance between the person who is hiding the secrets and those from whom the secrets are hidden. Joe’s original intention was not to set himself apart from his American peers; instead, he wanted to integrate with them, to be/become one of them. But the fact that he was afraid to reveal his accent, which entails his non-Americaness, sets him apart from them. He was afraid that his secrets would be exposed to the world, and he was afraid that the manifestation of his difference would prevent him from fitting into the society where he hoped to stand firm and reside for a long term. There was no secret, yet there was a secret. Indeed, Joe was hiding a secret from others, but what is behind the secret is more about anxiety and being afraid of making mistakes, nervous about losing his face, and scared of not being accepted and succeeding in the U.S.

“I Am Not Research Material”—When Can I Graduate?

My advisor never compliments my work. I think she criticizes me more. Our meetings usually end with her disappointing look or yelling. To be honest with you, I am frightened to meet with her each time, and I had to work extra hard each time prior to our meeting, but still it seems I cannot get her approval. I start to question that maybe I am not research material, and I feel stupid and weak in front of my advisor. I think to do a Ph.D. is to discover something on your own that no one else has found before, which demands innovation, but I think more and more I don’t have it in me. I really really want to graduate. But when? I don’t know. I am not making progress in my research. (Poem)

Poem is in her sixth year of the doctoral program, and I got to know that her graduation has been postponed a couple of times. She is still not sure when she will be able to graduate. Poem’s slow research progress, her advisor’s disappointment, and

limited contact with the outside world, make her more and more lonely, and feeling miserable about herself. The longer she stays in the program, the more lonely and bored she becomes, because like many graduate students in the science field, to do research means to sit in the lab and interact with a machine. There is very little outside communication with others, aside from meeting with her advisor once or twice a month.

Lonely, is composed of *lone* + *ly*, meaning, “having no companion, solitary” from the late 14th century. For anyone who is in a doctoral program, the thrill of program completion is inexplicable, and it is a statement and approval of one’s accomplishment in the field of study, regardless of the student’s nationality. But the whole process prior to that moment is a journey on one’s own, a lonely one. This journey can be more difficult for international students due to the distance from their families back home and lack of friendship support systems compared to their American peers. O’Donohue (1997) writes in *Anam Cara*, “When you are lonely, you become acutely conscious of your own separation” (p. 98). In a sense, Chinese international students are separated from their families and friends back home, in addition to being separated from the outside world. O’Donohue (1997) also comments that it is frightening to find the point of absolute nonconnection with everything and everyone else, although in the meanwhile it can be fascinating. Probably the sense of nonconnection with and separation from others are what hit Poem so hard, along with her slow research progress and no guarantee that she would find a job upon graduation. She could no longer contain herself and began weeping in front of me.

For quite a few minutes, I did not say anything. I was just trying to let it be, and give her a chance to let go of the sense of bitterness, sadness, and disconnectedness. I let

the silence speak. I let my heart listen, and hear what she said and did not say. To her, at that particular moment, “Words become powerless to express your pain; what others hear from your words is so distant and different from what you are actually suffering” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 102). Words became powerless, while tears are powerful enough to say it all. It reminds me of the poem, *The Power of A Tear*:

A tear
Carrying the DNA of pain
Washing away hurtful stains
A tear
Expressing unspeakable feelings
Creating new channels of healing
A tear
Traveling through tunnels of tragedy
Transporting tremendous tons of therapy
A tear
Rushing into a river of reformation
Creating a deluge of consolation
A tear
Tearing down walls of internal imprisonment
Building beautiful bridges of betterment
A tear
Providing homeostasis
Averting my crisis
A tear
Seasoned with the salt of reality
Rescued me from the claws of insanity
A tear
Flowing directly from the tear in my soul
Anchoring my feet and making me whole
A tear
Much thanks to you my dear tear
You are the reason I’m still here
(Simon, 2013)

Poem’s tears were her words, her statement, her expression of her feelings, her pain, revealing of her inner world, and her loneliness. She had been tired of hiding her pain, so it must have been therapeutic for her to cry everything out. O’Donohue (1997) told a story on what a man did over his lonely experience in Germany: when he felt like the

most abandoned orphan in the cosmos, he cried and cried in order to let out the loneliness that he had kept hidden. Indeed, it was a painful experience, but also a wonderful one for that man because he never felt lonely again in Germany. Unless we cry over joy, oftentimes we hesitate to cry in front of other people, because it is considered embarrassing, and a disclosure of weakness. I hope she felt better after shedding tears in front of me. I hope what was spoken and unspoken between us helped her to expel her loneliness, making her stronger.

Tears and silence, that is all we had for a little while. I did not want to ruin the moment; I did not want to interrupt that place of peace. I was breathing the air of bitterness, sadness, weakness and vulnerability, but I was happy because the tears also meant that she felt safe in front of me. I had wanted to create a safe space and an atmosphere of freedom in which my participants could move in their “thinking and feeling and being, in any direction they desire,” as Rogers (1961) wishes to create for his psychotherapy clients (p. 109). Most importantly, I wanted them to be themselves. Poem was simply a human being at that moment, and she was herself. I was glad. How difficult must it have been for her to swallow the bitterness of passing a dark tunnel by herself, and how suffocating must it be to keep it all to herself? The tears entailed her care, anxiety, and concern over her research, which she considered the niche for her to 安身立命, *an shen li ming*, which in Chinese means to settle down physically, to establish oneself, and to find a place for oneself spiritually as well.

My research and my doctoral degree are the means by which I can strike my roots in the U.S., to stand firm and to settle down. But now I am just so concerned and worried about when I can graduate, whether I can find a job. (Poem)

The tremendous amount of stress caused by Poem's doctoral program and uncertainty in finding a job as a foreign national in the U.S. can be understood by anyone who has had similar experiences. To understand is to transpose oneself, either to put oneself into another's situation, or to apply other situations to oneself (Gadamer, 1975/2011). All my participants are pursuing advanced degrees in their fields of study in the U.S., and it makes it easier for them to apply themselves to one another's situations, as their experiences are somewhat similar, and they share similar concerns. In addition to finishing their programs and finding jobs, my participants are also anxious over other aspects that their American peers do not face as well, such as financial problems, being away from home, deciding whether to return home or stay in the U.S., and trying to find a place to belong.

This is the sixth year of Julie's doctoral study as well, and she is in the final stage of her dissertation writing and looks forward to her graduation. Similar to Poem, Julie's graduation has been postponed a couple of times as well. When she first arrived at the University, her family supported her financially for the first semester due to the lack of department funding. The sense of guilt that her parents had to support her and the desire to be an independent woman motivated Julie to apply for any job she could think of that was relevant to her skill sets. She became desperate as she imagined the worst case scenario: not finding a job on campus. What should she do? Continue her studies but still live on her family's financial support? Go back to China? She tried her best and she got lucky. After two months of sleepless nights of submitting applications and preparing for interviews, she found a ten-hour assistantship position in the Asian American Studies office on campus. Later, this turned into a full-time assistantship to cover all her

academic costs. Julie was thrilled. I felt her excitement as I had been in her position before. During our conversations, I discovered that there was a disconnection between our lives and what we were studying. All the theories that had previously little relevance in our lives, became part of our daily reading, writing, discussions, and thoughts. Still we just could not get it. Julie confided in me that she had thought about dropping out of the program several times. So did I.

When I first started the program, I thought all the readings were so hard, maybe because I did not have a good foundation, because I only had read literature in the literature field, not that much in social sciences. So when I first came, I encountered issues on race, gender, social construction, I found it very hard to read at the beginning. I read very slowly, and of course I still read slowly now. I could not quite understand those abstract theories, so I had to read many times and take so many notes, but I still forgot. (Julie)

There was a period of time when I decided not to study immigration; however my new advisor had not yet arrived. I was very concerned, and I thought I could not see the end, and I did not know what to do having finished a couple of years of my Ph.D. study. Back then I did not drop out only because my partner was with me. Had there not been him, I think I would have dropped out after the 1st year of my study. You just did not see the point (of continuing). I think it is good to have someone that you can both take care of each other in life. K's presence made me feel that the whole thing is not that miserable or bad. (Julie)

Julie told me that she is homesick often, and she finds herself lonely as well: "Life could have been more difficult had my partner not been here." O'Donohue (1997) states that to be present is to engage actively in someone's life, and be part of it. "To be present means to participate. If someone was present at something, he knows all about how it really was" (Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 121). Julie's partner was present in the course of her doctoral study, and she felt understood by him. His presence definitely made her feel that she was not alone in the course of study with her family being absent, because "he is always there being part of my life." However, her partner found a job about a year ago in the Philadelphia area, and they have a two-hour-drive between them. She finds herself

lonely, even sometimes depressed, but she is trying her best to finish her dissertation, since it is too late for her to quit now. She is working on a dissertation that has all her passion, on how social media affects people's daily lives, and she is determined to finish it and graduate in a few months.

The forthcoming graduation means something to Julie, as well as to the other participants. For all of them, this is their only anchor in the U.S. due to their status restraint in employment. Alex shares:

I encountered many obstacles, and I am a little bit behind those with whom I entered the program the same time due to not being able to find an advisor who is willing to accept me and teach me, simply because of my biomedical engineering background. They questioned my ability, and still do, some even get very surprised that I know certain things in Computer Engineering. First they would ask me whether I know this or that, but even after I said yes to their questions, they were not impressed. Even my knowledge and work ability prove that I am capable. I think I am still treated a little bit different, as if I were less capable than others in my group. I came to the U.S. cheerfully and full of hope, and did not feel anything negative, because I felt that I was on a mission, and I was going to start a whole new chapter and to do research that I had always been curious and passionate about. However, after all the obstacles of seeking an advisor, trying to secure funding, I got rejected, and all the cold water started to pour on me, and my excitement disappeared. There was a period of time that I was very depressed and was so worried that no professor would want me, after having talked to almost every professor in my school who might have the slightest relevance to my research. So I became more practical, and had put aside my unrealistic dreams, and that is why I wanted to graduate as soon as I can, and I want to settle down my life first.

During the early time of my interaction with Alex, he struck me as someone who is calm, a little bit shy and reserved, who might need an extra “push” from me to share his inner world. To my surprise, our conversations flowed very smoothly and he was the one who was primarily doing the talking to unfold his two years of lived experience in the U.S. He was not defeated by the hardships; rather, he was grateful that he could finally find a place where he could do research, and settle down. His uncontrollable smile

and cheerful hand movements said it all about his excitement over the success of having been able to transfer to Computer Engineering from Biomedical Engineering. That excitement overrode every single hardship that he encountered during his stay in the U.S., including the experience of having walked one and half hours to a grocery store and then carrying all the items by hand, walking back for another two hours in the rain on a Sunday when buses were not running. But he still stays cheerful and hopeful for his future, and he thinks that his future will only be better after the completion of his doctoral program, since the Ph.D. is “my capital to settle down in the U.S.”

I don't think I am or can be defeated by this, even when I had to walk to a grocery store or IKEA on foot in the rain. I still felt hopeful, as if I was walking on a hopeful and bright path to my dreamed career, which is to become something in Computer Engineering field after I successfully switched my field, and I can get a chance to enjoy the academic freedom here.

Despite the fact that he has to be partially financially responsible for his studies, mainly because of the tight budget from his department, Alex is still highly cheerful and hopeful about his future. He is also very grateful that only in the U.S. academic environment would it be possible that he could switch his area of expertise from Biomedical Engineering to Computer Engineering, where his passion resides. Finances are no small issue for any graduate student, let alone international students, who are charged with out-of-state tuition and fees. But that is not an issue that hinders Alex from foreseeing a prosperous future upon graduation. He is making good progress in his research and he looks forward to graduating as soon as possible. To use his words: “Everything is going well academically, except sometimes I am a little bit discouraged that it seems impossible for me to integrate myself into the American society outside of academia.”

Going Native—The Integration into Americanness

Native, from Latin *nativus*, means “innate, produced by birth;” from 14th century English, means “natural, hereditary, connected with something in a natural way.” To be a native of a particular place means to be born into that place, wherein one is connected with something in a natural way, such as language, food, practices, traditions, customs, or culture in general, and a myriad of life aspects. *Natural*, also means “of one’s inborn character, hereditary, by birth.” To be natural in something indicates that no artificial assistance is needed, simply because we have already formed an image of the way something is or works, and it comes as if it is in our nature, that is, we don’t have to think long or hard about it.

Obviously, if a person was born into one place, we can call that person a native, such as a Chinese native, or an American native. Whenever a person goes to another environment or cultural context, the suggestion is often given, “do as the Romans do,” or “do as the natives/locals do.” To do as the natives/locals do is to follow, imitate the behaviors of the natives, to be one of them, and to conform properly to the contour of rules and practices of the natives, or as my participants may call it, to fit in. *Fit*, means to “be suitable,” to “be the right shape,” so that a thing or a person can fill exactly a given space, or be adjusted or adjustable to a certain position (*Online Etymology Dictionary & Oxford English Dictionary*). To fit in is to have the right size and the right shape, so that you can be in something. Right, from Old English *riht*, means to be “proper, not bent.” What does the “right” size or shape entail? If something stays “not bent,” will it be the “right” size or shape? If something needs to be the “right” size or shape, does it mean that thing needs to be “bent” necessarily? To bend something probably means to adjust the size and shape of something.

Adjustment does not only require that the individual be open to novelty and cope with change. More importantly, it demands that the change be accommodated at a deeply personal level: To adjust without changing is not possible. (Ritivoi, 2002, p. 98)

What does one have to change to be suitable to the rules of natives? *Fit*, also from Old English *fitt*, means “conflict” or “struggle,” and has a meaning of “a painful, exciting experience.” Is it even possible that my participants can go native, or even be close to being native? What does it take? Are their experiences also exciting but painful, involving conflict as well as struggle?

To fit in means to have more communications and interactions with American students; of course I am only speaking from a student’s perspective. (Ashley)

What does a conversation take? Generally speaking, we communicate by the language that we speak. Ashley’s point of “communicating with American students” means that we communicate with them in the commonly accepted language, English. It is required that international students pass the English language requirement in order to attend U.S. higher education institutions, and we would assume that language per se would not be a problem for most international students. However, to communicate goes beyond the language.

Usually, the basic form of communication starts with a conversation.

“Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding” (Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 387). Many things can be or become our conversation topics. However, I often hear Chinese students say: “We (Chinese and Americans) have nothing to talk about,” or “it is just hard.” Nothing to talk about? Would weather, music, sports, study, or culture in general not be conversation topics? Is it that “hard” to pick something from the list above and “talk about” it, hence, to start a conversation? Is a conversation that hard to initiate?

The problem is that you have to find a point/stand where you can start. In order to start a conversation, one person has to have the desire to talk, and the other(s) the desire to listen. Exactly, trying to switch your talk into this point/stand is the most difficult part. If your conversation stays on the surface level, such as asking, “How are you?” or “How are your classes?” or “How is your dissertation going?” there is no way that you could have a conversation on a deeper level, because there is nothing in common that can connect us, and to have a conversation. I don’t blame them. I can step into their shoes and think from their perspective: you are a foreigner, you have nothing to do with my project, my research, you don’t have an overlap with my life, so I don’t have an interest to get to know you or China. (Ashley)

Ashley’s words made me realize that “How are you?” is a question, yet is a greeting alone, which means that oftentimes an answer is not expected. It is not uncommon to see moments such as when two people run into each other, one asks “how are you?” the other answers “good” or “fine” followed by the same question, “How are you?” The second question might not be followed by an answer at all, with the two people continuing to walk on, back to their agenda, as if nothing just happened. I am quite sure that each of us has either experienced or observed similar moments, and for those of us who are used to such moments, we might find nothing awkward or strange, nor do we rarely give it much thought whether it is a question or simply a greeting. However, for a person who freshly came from a culture where “How are you?” is not the standard greeting or a question to ask when people meet, that person might be confused at such moments. Should I answer it or should I walk away? If I answer it, what kind of answer should I provide? Why is the asking of “How are you?” considered a superficial interaction? Is it because Ashley feels that the appropriate answer to the question “How are you?” is either “Fine” or such similar terms, or simply not to answer at all? Is it because she feels that there is no space or opportunity for further and deeper communication after this cold routinized greeting? As a person coming from a different culture, how can she evaluate whether it would be

appropriate to be honest about how she is doing? How can she know whether people have the interest and willingness to learn about her and her wellbeing? There is a limit.

Cameron (2002) in *The Nursing "How Are You?"* writes:

Both the question and the response lie within such carefully programmed limits. It is difficult to know when to push for further communication because we are not always certain about the other's willingness to delve deeper or if we have adequately accessed the affective response of the other. (p. 12)

Ashley would like to tell those who ask her "How are you?" how she indeed is doing; however, she oftentimes does not, because she senses that "They just superficially ask 'How Are You?' and she feels they would not be willing to "get to know you and your life from a deeper level, because they do not have the interest to do so." Ashley might be right, but I cannot stop asking myself: Are all "How are you?" questions that I encounter superficial interactions as Ashley described? I do not think so. When my American friends ask me "How are you?" I know that they mean it and they expect to hear an honest answer from me to get to know how indeed I am doing. Might it be the case that Ashley formed some stereotypes about American people having had some superficial "How are you?" interactions with some strangers or classmates?

Bell hooks (2009) writes, "Stereotypes abound when there is distance. They are an invention, a pretense that one knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken or are not allowed" (p. 96). Some of Ashley's superficial interactions with Americans have facilitated this distance creating, which further reinforces her stereotypes that Americans have no genuine interest to get to know her as a person, and it hinders her establishing friendships with Americans. Sun Quan feels the same way:

How would you expect the conversations to go into a deeper level if all the occasions you interact with each other is within classroom/academic settings, and all you talk about is your classes or research? Had there been no interaction with international students or had they not been to other countries, Americans would superficially ask you ‘How are you?’ but they would not be willing to get to know you and your life from a deeper level, because they did not have the interest to do so.

“How are you?” just functions as a polite requirement for a street interaction or random meeting, nothing else. With the sense of no such interest existing, Ashley told me that she simply answers “Fine” each time. With no such interest, the space for further and deeper communication cannot be created, let alone the potential for friendship. Ashley and Sun Quan’s observations are not completely incorrect: oftentimes we do ask the “How are you?” question with no sincere or genuine desire to inquire about the wellbeing of the person of whom we asked the question.

To desire something means to wish and long for something, all of which originates from interest. With no interest, we would not desire something. To desire to talk to or listen to another person and have a conversation is to have interest in that person’s life, to have a concern. The interest in getting to know, the willingness to talk, and the patience to listen composes the basic foundation for a conversation. From there, a “point/stand” can be formed from which a conversation can depart and take off. A desire and need to get to know each other can be developed; from there, the situation of “nothing to talk about” no longer exists. A conversation goes beyond the superficial “how are you?” and delves into a deeper level. Those are the ideal conversation elements that can be the starting point contributing to the interaction between Chinese and American students, and students from other countries.

“It is just hard”—Separation of academic and non-academic environment. As

Ashley mentions, there are many “How” questions: “How are your classes?” “How is your dissertation going?” and certainly “How are you?” Although oftentimes we respond with a generic: “Great,” or “OK,” there are some nuances among these “How” questions, as some are more impersonal, while some are more personal, such as the question “How are you?” with the emphasis on “You,” the person who was asked. As Alex indicates, the one is about business, while the other is on a personal level.

Work, research, conferences, or stuff that you work together, there is no problem at all, because all of them are business. If it is business, you can easily communicate with each other. But it is a different story outside of business.
(Alex)

He gave me an example of the difficulty between him and one of his colleagues trying to continue a conversation outside of work:

I think it is hard to grasp what they are saying, such as slangs or Internet phrases. It is just hard for us to even jump in and be part of the conversation, and I think they would think that I am very boring. There was one time that I could not understand it at all, and I asked him later on, he seriously explained it to me, but with one additional comment: “You are ruining all the fun.” I think he was just joking, of course he meant that “you don’t even know this?” But this actually reflects a problem, that is, we are people from two different worlds, and it is not going to be easy to find something in common and continue that.

What others think is funny might not be funny from our perspectives; therefore, it is not uncommon to experience moments such as either not to catch the “funny moment” or the “punch line,” or we catch it a second too late. We might also try too hard to tell a joke that we considered hilarious in our own culture, but end up with “the misery of failing to amuse” (Hoffman, 1989, pp. 117-118). When similar situations take place, we end up being called “boring,” or later we pretend that we have understood the jokes. But whatever we do, somehow we develop “a sense of dislike of ourselves, and a sense of

embarrassment” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 118). We found no interest in what others like, and vice versa:

Most Chinese that I know of, are quite *zhai*, 宅, (it literally means house in Chinese, and refers to the situation of those who stay home all the time), and the primary way that they spend their free time is gather to eat, have a potluck or play the mafia card games.

I think American students like parties, exercise, and I think most Chinese students don't like them, no matter boys or girls. Of course I am only speaking in general, but I think whatever they like or play, Chinese students don't like them, because of cultural differences. (Ashley)

Americans like to exercise and bodybuilding, but Chinese do not. Why do you think we are here (in American graduate schools)? It is because we do not exercise. (Alex)

The statements from Ashley and Alex might not be necessarily true for the differences between Chinese and American students, but they are speaking from their hearts from what they have experienced so far. Due to the language difficulties and lack of common interests, more and more they find the differences between them and American students, and less and less willing are they to interact with American students outside of academic environments.

After my several attempts (to make friends with Americans), I found that you (Chinese) don't want to hang out with them (Americans), and they (Americans) don't want to hang out with you (Chinese) either. So Chinese hang out with Chinese, Indians hang out with Indians, Russians hang out with Russians, so people automatically segregate from one another. (Alex)

In Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood's (2013) *Social Interactions and the International Student Experience*, Chinese students, along with students from Taiwan, South Korea, India, and Turkey, were identified as *self-segregators*, among the 60 international students that were interviewed. *Self-segregators* refer to those

Who engaged in self-segregation, socially interacting primarily with conationals, that is, self-segregators typically engaged in social activities with other people

from their country of origin, while excluding other international students and Americans from their nonacademic, social lives. (p. 418)

The word segregation usually carries a negative connotation; however, the segregation from American students or students from other countries does not bother

Alex:

I don't think it is forced nor is it a big social problem, rather it is a natural process. Everyone does it voluntarily. If a conversation does not sustain, of course you would go and find people with whom you can have conversations.

A simple conversation is the start of a journey for people to get to know each other, then you find something in common with those with whom you feel comfortable speaking, and sharing, rather than receiving a statement "You are ruining all the fun." The simple statement indicates that neither party is having or continues to have fun. The fun is ruined, conversation is over, and you feel somewhat hurt that you had been called "boring." If someone is considered boring or the conversation is boring, we lose our attention and interest, and the outcome is that the conversation ends up going nowhere, let alone going beyond the superficial level of small talk. So we turn to those with whom we feel we can share a conversation and the small social circle gradually forms, because "the Chinese understand the situation of Chinese better." (Alex)

Chinese understand the situation of Chinese better. Indeed, from the moment that newcomers arrive in a foreign country, the presence of fellowmen/women from their own country of origin eases their transition in myriad ways: from being assisted with running errands, being provided with the general linguistic and cultural orientation to the new setting which serves as their segway into the general social milieu, to receiving guidance and advice on what to and what not to do, to the establishment of companionship, friendship, and a social support network, that is, the early comers help

the later comers adjust to the new environment, settle down, and form a circle to create a community and home away from home (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). That is, the early comers understand the situation of those later comers. But who are those Chinese to which Alex was referring?

They are neither Chinese living in a Chinese context, such as people like my mother or my grandmother, nor Chinese who were born in the U.S, as they are Chinese of a different kind based on Julie's interpretation: they are "Chinese Americans," who are not the same as "Chinese in America."

Chinese Americans have not lived in other countries; they don't understand what it is like for you to jump out of one culture to live in another culture, and to plant your root there to stand on your feet and the capacity that it takes. They might be bilinguals, and they might know how to dress appropriately for Chinese and Americans, but it is very very different. So let me ask you, if you meet an American born Chinese (ABC), would you think that you two are the same? Would you consider them as someone who can understand what you are going through, as opposed to those who came from China and have been or are in the same boat as you are? (Julie)

I did not have answers to Julie's questions, because I had to recognize the difference between American born Chinese and Chinese like me. I have to admit that I do not understand their upbringing experiences, being raised as "Asian or Chinese Americans," as Julie describes; nor do they understand what we are going through, for persons like my participants and me. They cannot grasp our nostalgia, or the effort to fend off that nostalgia or loneliness when life is hard. With no families around, it takes courage and boldness to be by oneself in a foreign country. Our anxieties are myriad regarding basic aspects in life: trying to survive in a foreign country, effort to be like one of the natives, disappointment in not being able to take an off-campus internship or work opportunity due to the F-1 student visa limitations, and uncertainty of securing employment upon graduation, and the list goes on. Indeed, can they understand what

Chinese international students are going through? So who are the Chinese that can understand us? The Chinese Alex is referring to are those who are Chinese/of Chinese descent, have overseas living experience, and are highly influenced by dual or multi-cultures. They would be able to “understand” the situation better, such as language, cultural differences, daily experiences, confusions, and even struggles.

Alex and Julie’s comments remind me of a phrase, *ta xiang yu gu zhi*, 他乡遇故知, in Chinese, which is widely considered as one of the most joyful moments in a person’s life journey. *Ta* 他 means other and different, *xiang* 乡 means place, *yu* 遇 means meet, *gu* 故 means old, and *zhi* 知 means friends, and also knowing and understanding. *Guzhi* 故知 literally means old friend(s), but it goes beyond that, since it can refer to anyone who can possibly have the slightest association or connection with us back home, such as distant family members that we never met, people who went to the same alma mater, friends’ friends that we never met, and so on. Anything or anyone that might have the slightest association with home can stir a sense of nostalgia, a mutually recognized understanding, an emergence of excitement, and a feeling of home:

It could be caused by meeting someone from the home country. It may be triggered by a letter from home, a movie produced at home, a book about home, or even seeing or hearing the name of the home country. A piece of music can create strong feelings. (Wu, 1991, p. 274)

Those Chinese were originally not family or friends, but the scenario that we run into or meet one another in a foreign environment automatically brings us closer, and makes us thrilled. That *gu zhi* 故知 indicates an invisible mutual understanding without anything being said, and represents a symbol of familiarity that we feel comfortable with, reminds us of our past memories, and gives us a sense of comfort that makes us feel at

home away from our home. Chinese students are my *gu zhi*, and we are each other's *gu zhi*. With them, we can speak the language in which “we don't have to think, and which evokes our emotions” (Evan).

The Intertwining between Language and Culture

We are a sign that is not read,
We feel no pain, we almost have
Lost our tongue in foreign lands.
(Hölderlin, as cited in Heidegger, 2008b, p. 375)

When we communicate, the first tool being utilized by us is the language that we use on a daily basis. Many of my participants told me about the comments that they receive when they go home for visit, such as “I bet you have no communication problems at all now after living in the U.S. for so many years!” or “Your English must be so good now!” Here, the communication that they are referring to, certainly is not communication with Chinese people, as they never doubted that they would have communication problems with Chinese; instead, they are referring to American people, or people who speak English in the U.S. Indeed, compared to many people back in China, their English is good after both physically living here and through their thorough academic training. But do they, indeed have, no communication problems? Is communication simply tossing a few words in a particular language back and forth? Are we communicating the language, or are we communicating *in* the language? Is language not simply a medium through which we communicate? Why are my participants frustrated by the superficial conversations such as, “How are you?” but find it difficult to initiate deeper level conversations themselves? What indeed is language and what is behind a language? What went wrong during their communication? Don't they speak the same language?

“Communication is Cultural Communication”

Every communication is cultural and eventually you have to return to culture in order to communicate. (Joe)

Outside your work and study, there are some barriers between your communications with Americans, because communication is cultural communication. (Alex)

Alex and Joe were not the only participants who indicated that communication is cultural communication. Because of that, outside of work or professional environments, they find it difficult to communicate with Americans, using English, which is not their first language. Communication is more about that which is behind the language, culture. To be able to speak a language does not mean to be able to communicate, because “each language is loaded with culture, and culture is in a language” (Agar, 1994, p. 28). We might be able to master the grammar and dictionary, but “without culture we cannot communicate” (p. 29). But oftentimes not until we run out of the vocabulary in a foreign language, or we have a problem with that language, do we realize and recognize the association or connection between language and culture, and that communication problems have to do with who we are, in which culture plays an important role.

What is communication? Agar (1994) states: “Communication is encounters of different mentality, different meanings, a different tie between language and consciousness” (p. 23). Communication is the meeting of language, behind which there is culture and consciousness, as “to speak a language means to live in it,” and we “understand a language by living it” (Agar, 1994, p. 20; Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 386).

What does it mean to “live in” a language and how do we achieve that? When can we see ourselves officially and naturally “living in” a language? And can we live in a foreign language?

When a person lives in a language, he is filled with the sense of the unsurpassable appropriateness of the words he uses for the subject matter he is talking about. It seems impossible that other words in other languages could name the things equally well. (Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 403)

To live in a foreign language means that we no longer need to translate that language into our mother tongue; rather, we “think in that foreign language” (Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 387). Gadamer contends that every language can be learned so perfectly that we eventually do not need translation back and forth but we think in the foreign language. How do we think in a foreign language?

To think in something means to react immediately without a second thought. To think in a language means that that language simply comes naturally, as the language “flows in our bloodstream,” and that it is part of us, both body and mind (Hoffman, 1989, p. 243). To think in a language also means to think in a particular culture that associates with that language. Language and culture are inseparable. “Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people” (Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 386). The more we can think in a language, the more convenient and conducive understanding becomes, including understanding of one’s culture. More and more, it becomes “a transparent medium in which I live and which lives in me—a medium through which I can once again get to myself and to the world” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 243). Language is the medium through which we communicate with each other and the way that we live, influenced by where we come from. Communication is an exchange of who we are, which certainly includes the culture that shaped us, that is, communication is “cultural communication” as my participants shared.

The encounter of two languages is actually the encounter of two cultures, two ways of thinking, and two mentalities. Language and culture are inseparable. In communication, there is an “out-of-awareness” aspect:

We must never assume that we are fully aware of what we communicate to someone else. There exist in the world today tremendous distortions in meaning as men try to communicate with each other. (Hall, 1959, p. 38)

Culture, which is treated as a form of communication by Hall, has its “out-of-awareness” or “unconscious awareness” as well, because we simply tend to take our behaviors for granted—the part that we don’t think about, since we assume that something is universal or we regard it as idiosyncratic (Hall).

The Unconscious Awareness of Culture—like Noodle, like Rice

What exactly is culture? A very wise person and also a good friend once told me that culture cannot be explained, that if a person needs to explain to another person what the culture is, then the other person is not in that particular culture or knows little about that culture. I ponder the meaning of that statement. Taylor (2002) states that an important element of culture is “the hundreds of familiar behaviors that are trivial in their own right but that accumulate to create a sense of social familiarity, comfort, and meaning that is essential” (p. 48). Indeed, culture is something that shaped us and became part of us; it is who we are, it is that which makes everything simply take place naturally, and we do not have a second thought about why certain things happen in certain ways. The necessity to explain a culture indicates the differences and contrasts, and possible confusion, when cultures are juxtaposed. Encountering a different culture, we might feel surprised, excited, confused, perplexed, and not used to. By all of these things we experience culture shock.

What exactly is culture shock? Is the fact of having found nothing to talk about with American students part of culture shock? What else are they shocked about? When we find out that which we are shocked about in another culture, it helps to understand both cultures more clearly and accurately by comparison and contrast. Anthropologist Oberg (1960), who first used the phrase “culture shock,” describes it in the following way:

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life... All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficacy on hundreds of these cues, most of which we are not consciously aware. (p. 142)

According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, “conscious” means “intentional,” or “aware of what one is doing or intending to do,” or “having a purpose and intention in one’s actions.” Therefore, to be consciously aware means to become aware of something intentionally. But the term “not consciously aware” indicates that we are still “aware,” just not intentionally, rather quite the opposite: unintentionally, unconsciously. If we need to remember and memorize something, we do it deliberately or intentionally, so that we can be aware; but if we do not do it intentionally but still are aware, that means it is part of us. That is the concept my friend described: the unexplainable. And this unexplainable is usually our first unconscious awareness.

After Hoffman (1989) migrated to Vancouver with her parents, then proceeded with her higher education in the U.S., she had acquired a second unconscious:

Maybe, behind my back and while I wasn't looking, I've acquired a second unconscious, an American one, made of diverse cultural matter. Like any unconscious, this one is hard to pin down. (p. 221)

There are two circumstances involved when we acquire something: either intentionally or unintentionally. American culture became her second unconscious, while Polish culture was her first. For my participants, I am not sure how much they have acquired of this second unconscious, but one thing for sure is that the first unconscious still plays a primary role in their lives. The first unconscious awareness, the Chinese culture, as a predominant culture that had shaped them before they came to the U.S., "flows through their veins" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 221), which makes them unconsciously aware of the routines of what to do or what not to do, such as:

When to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to servants, how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. (Oberg, 1960, p. 142)

Those cues are imbedded in our daily routines, and we acquire them subconsciously, rather than consciously, intentionally, or purposefully. Those cues can be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms to which we were used as we grew up. They became part of us such that without them we feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar. Julie gave me a perfect example to explain this "unconscious awareness:"

When we talk about culture, we always talk about Confucius, or something very big. After you come here, you realize that culture is actually something very small. It is just like every few days you cannot stand the fact that you haven't eaten rice, and you want to eat some rice and fried dishes. It is that simple. I think the daily life is your everyday culture, and it is extremely hard to change. I think the rice example gives you a good description of what culture is. I think eventually culture is something that you cannot live without.

Julie's words caused me to think and re-reflect on what culture means to me. Julie is from the southern part of China, where rice is the staple, while I am from the Northern part of China, where noodles are the staple. Different from her, I grew up eating noodles. I can definitely recall the moment when I craved noodles after several days of noodle

deprivation. Now I recall the question that my grandma raised: “How do you survive in the U.S.?” simple yet profound. Yes, how did I live through all those years without the abundance of pieces of daily life, that is, part of my culture, part of me: rice, noodles, language, and daily practices? Isn’t it true that we resisted all those pieces and parts of us when we thought that we were and could be growing roots somewhere else and that we could live without that part of us (De Courtivron, 2007)? But the question is: can we indeed live without them? Even a deprivation of rice or noodles for several days can draw out a sense of nostalgia. What about the familiar signs and symbols: language, faces, and memories associated with all of the above? Might it be that they are so familiar that we are unconsciously aware that we take them for granted?

I think culture should be something ‘taken for granted,’ something that you are so used to in daily life, and you naturally accept it, and you wouldn’t think about it. For example, what is culture? In Chinese culture, personal relations are very harmonious, family, relatives, and you have different names for different uncles and aunts, such as your mother’s brother, your father’s older or younger brother, your mother’s sister, your father’s sister, and so on. They are all referred to differently. Everything is very clear, right? But they don’t have it in America. You only have uncle or aunt, and you don’t know whom they are referring to. So what does it indicate? It indicates that the personal relation is very important in Chinese society, who is who, what kind of position a person has, who and who having what kind of relations, very important. China is a society of personal relations, but U.S. is not. This is a major part of China, and this is culture.
(Sun Quan)

How we address our families and relatives can be signs to interpret what a culture is for Sun Quan. Culture can be found in the slightest aspect in our daily lives, which can easily be “taken for granted.” Apart from different definitions that scholars provide in literature, different persons have various definitions of culture as well, based on their own experiences. The culture within us guides how we speak and how we think. Oftentimes

culture is so imbedded in us that we do not see it until we step away from it, until the culture shock and reflection on culture make us aware of our difference.

What does it mean to “drink”?—Word, memory, and culture.

You went to a party and met some friends, then you found out that you both like drinking. But what they talk about is about wine, and from the bottom of my heart, I want to talk about Chinese liquor, but they can't, because it is cultural, and it has to return to culture. What you know is based on your previous experience about which they don't know, and vice versa. What they have accumulated growing up is different from what you have. (Joe)

The simple term “drinking” resonates differently for Joe and the people that he met, who also happened to like drinking. The word “drinking” is a simple word that could be considered an easy discussion topic, but are they referring to the same term “drinking?” Yes, they are speaking English, but indeed are they speaking the same language? Even the same words can mean different things for different people. It can be confusing or lead to the conversation ending up going nowhere only to realize that one person does not understand what the other person is talking about even though the appearance is that they are talking about the same word. Chinese liquor came to Joe's mind automatically, because that is what he has known about drinking. However, during communication with people from different backgrounds, the “natural” way of doing or thinking does not become “natural” at all (Agar, 1994, p. 14). For instance, Agar (1994) experienced a circumstance similarly interesting and confusing: at a reception having successfully assured that the project he was working on was making good progress, he offered to buy a female colleague a drink. However he received a look from her, because the colleague interpreted the drink differently, even though they were both native English speakers. Agar was confused, because he indicated that he only wanted to celebrate and

offer to buy his colleague a drink, regardless of the gender of that colleague. Different definitions and concepts came to their minds, although speaking of the same word.

Different meanings of “drinking” emerged while Joe was having conversations with his American friends: for Joe it is Chinese liquor, while for the American, it can be any alcoholic drink other than Chinese liquor. The “drinking” goes beyond Chinese liquor to the particular occasion in which Chinese liquor manifests in Joe’s memory. O’Donohue (1999) in *Eternal Echoes* writes: “Each language has a unique memory. The thoughts, whispers, and voices of a people live in their language.... The memory of a people lives in the rich landscape of its language” (pp. 252-253). When Joe thought about drinking, Chinese liquor came to his mind, most often around the Chinese New Year, friends’ weddings, family reunions, gathering with friends, traditional Chinese holiday times and other celebratory moments. “Memory is the place where the past is gathered” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 171). Each person’s different past individualizes that person’s memory: unique and personal. Our memories come from our daily lives, people we have met, conversations we had, and activities in which we were engaged. Those pieces structure our memories, “an inner temple of feeling and sensibility” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 173). The conversation on drinking is no longer one on “drinking” or the language per se, but it draws out the memory of drinking for each conversation participant, which is vastly different based on the cultural context which they are from. Language and culture are inseparable, which reinforces the idea brought forward by my participants: “communication is cultural communication.”

Seeing the Familiar through the Unfamiliar

In this chapter, I illuminated the ways in which my participants orient themselves on a daily basis in the U.S., including how they experience space and time, their sense of

losing bearings in the midst of unfamiliarity and newness, their concerns and worries in both academic and non-academic environments, and the intimacies that they find between language and culture in which they simultaneously live.

I had the chance to listen to their views as well as to reflect on my own from their comments such as the individualistic nature of U.S. society, and the feeling of being “perpetual foreigners” even though they felt they had come to the land of space and freedom. Some wanted to strike their roots and reside permanently in the U.S., while others felt that the marginalization of being a foreigner and a minority would continue to exist.

The experiences of my participants differ and the angles from which they interpret their experiences vary despite the fact that they come from the same country. Even within the same country, differences manifest, such as the difference between the Northern and Southern part of China, which leads to the noodle and rice interpretation of culture noted previously. The field of their studies plays a role in their interpretation and meaning making of their experiences. For participants who are in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) area, they focused on the evolution of science and technology and did not pay much attention to social phenomena around them. This might be due to the fact that the languages in which they communicate the most are the technical and professional terminologies used in their specific fields.

However, language is too important to be ignored in any circumstance. Although my participants indicated that they have no difficulties conveying themselves in academic and professional environments, it still can be challenging depending on their areas of study. For my participants in the STEM field, English is the primary language for

communication with their colleagues and faculty; however, they also communicate in a language that is more discipline specific, such as programming codes or terminologies. For Julie and Ashley, who are in American Studies and Education respectively, the demand for English language proficiency is higher in their academic fields, such as in classroom discussion, volume of reading, and also academic writings. But the language issues that all my participants encounter outside of academic environments are the same. They lack the cultural knowledge associated with the language being spoken in the social environment. As my participants indicated, we cannot discuss language without discussing culture, and the association between the two.

However, how do we live in different languages? How do we bridge cultures together? How does it help with our own culture? What should we do differently to make their experiences more meaningful and self-directed? Pedagogical insights regarding these questions are presented in the following and final chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: BEING RE-ORIENTED THROUGH CULTIVATING PLACE-CONSCIOUS PEDAGOGY

We get back into place—dwelling place—by the cultivation of built places. Such cultivation *localizes caring*. ... We care about places as well as people, so much so that we can say that *caring belongs to places*. We care about places in many ways, but in building on them—*building with them*, indeed, *building them*—they become the ongoing “stars of our life,” that to which we turn when we travel and to which we return when we come back home. (Casey, 2009, pp. 175-176)

The living world—this ambiguous realm that we experience in anger and joy, in grief and in love—is both the soil in which all our sciences are rooted and the rich humus into which their results ultimately return, whether as nutrients or as poisons. Our spontaneous experience of the world, charged with subjective, emotional, and intuitive content, remains the rival and dark ground of all our objectivity. (Abram, 1996, p. 34)

All our experiences in the world are imbedded in places. Places are present everywhere in our lives with their considerable, yet mysterious, power. Place is indispensable in our lives (Casey, 2009). It takes time to get used to a place and it is easy to get lost in a new place. Encountered with this predicament of being lost, we focus on how to achieve orientation and stability in a new environment. Why do we intend to do so, to achieve our orientations? “Orientation led us to a consideration of the body’s concrete role in place, and drew us into a discussion of built places” (Casey, 2009, p. 147). To get orientated helps us recognize our body, our place, and to dwell in those places. We live in places, we dwell in places, and more importantly, we cultivate places. Etymologically, the word *cultivate* comes from the Latin verb *colere*, one of whose basic meanings is “to care for” (Casey, p. 173). To “care for” someone or something involves our emotions.

We experience this world with our emotions on a daily basis. With no emotions, we are not beings and cannot fully experience the world. Our emotions can be contradictory, but also complimentary, as one reflects the other, such as anger and joy,

grief and love. To have access to one's emotions is to have access to one's inner world in this living world. I am grateful that my dissertation research granted me this privilege to delve into the inner worlds of my participants, to learn about their "being" in the world as Chinese international graduate students through their lived experiences in the U.S., which for them is filled with expressions of their emotions and intuitions. Indeed, emotions and intuitions are subjective, but they are the most valuable source by which and through which our objectivity originates, and they, too, are our ways of knowing things.

Emotion, from middle French *émotion*, means agitation of mind, excited mental state, movement, disturbance, strong feelings, and passion. Emotions stir up something deep inside of us. Emotions help us to "feel and think," and to ask questions.

To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer. The significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned. It has to be brought into this state of indeterminacy, so that there is an equilibrium between pro and contra. The sense of every question is realized in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question. Every true question requires this openness. (Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 357)

A true question is asked to create this openness. The open nature of a true question determines that a true question is not a problem question, in which a study aims to identify and solve a problem whereby the completion of a study indicates the problem having been solved. Rather, a true question is a *meaning question*. A meaning question can be discussed and researched without limit and without settlement; a meaning question cannot be "solved" and in that way done away with. Rather, *meaning questions*

Can be better or more deeply understood, so that, on the basis of this understanding I may be able to act more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations... Meaning questions can never be closed down, they will always remain the subject matter of the conversational relations of lived life, and they

will need to be appropriated, in a personal way, by anyone who hopes to benefit from such insight. (van Manen, 2005, p. 138)

Meaning questions direct us to possible actions, and action is the key. Meaning questions ask us how we can act thoughtfully and tactfully; meaning questions guide each of us to connect in a more personal and meaningful way: how does each and every one of us make sense and meaning of certain experiences? What actions can be taken to connect us better? Phenomenological studies ask such meaning questions.

Through this study I have opened up the question, “What is it like to be a Chinese international graduate student in the U.S.?” I started conversations with my participants and with myself, and I now seek to continue these conversations with my readers at another level, so that we may collect our experiences together, in order to understand the experiences of my participants and ourselves as beings in general. Through this continuing conversation we may see new pedagogical insights, and “discover and recognize a valid meaning” (Gadamer, 1975/2011, p. 324). Through these continued conversations we may begin to act more thoughtfully and tactfully. More specifically, my hope is that my dissertation research will shed light on ways in which we can prepare ourselves and support international students in order for them to have more meaningful and self-oriented experiences.

In order to help international students succeed, as well as to create a learning environment for others, it is most important to understand what distinguishes Chinese international graduate students from domestic graduate students (Thomas & Althen, 1989): the challenges they face, the aspects of their lived experience about which we had little previous knowledge, and finally—the actions, approaches, and resources that might help them. Hopefully, through my “showing” of these aspects of the lived experiences of

Chinese international graduate students, we can help to open their experiences, and through that opening uncover new understanding that leads to pedagogical practices that will enhance the overall quality of their time in the U.S.

Journey to Learn, Journey to Write

Seven years ago, I started my journey as an international student in the United States, first to pursue a Master's degree, then a Doctorate. It is a journey in the pursuit of knowledge as well as an experience of personal development. I've learned much from this journey, both within classrooms, and outside of school. I've learned much about education in the U.S., as well as in a global context. I've learned about myself as an international student in a foreign country, and I've learned about myself as a human being. As I was learning about myself, I became more interested in learning about the lives of other international students like myself, and I was seeking a methodology that could help me "show" the lived experiences of international students, Chinese international graduate students in particular, because I myself am one of them and as such, I am a part of this lived experience.

Writing and Rewriting

Three years ago, in a course titled Phenomenological Inquiry I, I was introduced to phenomenology as a research methodology and found that it was the methodology that I had been seeking. As a methodology it allowed a way to delve deeper into understanding the experiences of Chinese international graduate students. The journey began there. It is a journey that I had not anticipated, one that was filled with writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1990), and one that transformed me.

Phenomenological projects and their methods often have a transformative effect on the researcher himself or herself. Indeed, phenomenological research is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness,

heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness and tact, and so on. (van Manen, 1990, p. 163)

Throughout this learning journey, I discovered much about myself as well as the seven international graduate student participants from China in my study. I learned that their experiences as Chinese international graduate students are similar to, as well as different from, my own experience. I learned, as mentioned in Chapter Four, that my participants encounter familiarity and strangeness on a daily basis, and that they are constantly seeking and negotiating where they are and who they are. Gadamer (1960/1989) says, “Hermeneutic work is based on a popularity of familiarity and strangeness” (p. 295). My phenomenological dissertation is a hermeneutic work; not only is it based on familiarity and strangeness, but also it intends to show a picture of familiarity and strangeness in which my participants are immersed. I also learned that in order for me to uncover and interpret the lived experience of Chinese international graduate students, besides numerous readings of different sources and rounds of conversations with my participants, I had to do so through the act of writing and rewriting.

Writing is never an easy task, and writing in a second language requires an additional level of interpretation. Van Manen (1990) calls writing “a reflexive activity that involves the totality of our physical and mental being” (p. 132). As I get closer to the end of writing my dissertation, I resonate with my participants in relation to how challenging it can be to pursue a post-graduate degree in another country: to think and write, and in a sense, to live in a language that is not our own. The closer I get to finishing, the more impatient I am with my own writing, due to the numerous drafts written and rewritten:

The process of writing and rewriting (including revising or editing) is more reminiscent of the artistic activity of creating an art object that has to be approached again and again, now here and then there, going back and forth between the parts and the whole in order to arrive at a finely crafted piece that often reflects the personal “signature” of the author. (van Manen, 1990, pp. 131-132)

The writing and rewriting are to make sure that we seek the most accurate words/phrases to express what we desire to convey.

In Chinese, the process of figuring out the most accurate words is called 推敲 *tui qiao* and 琢磨 *zhuo mo*, which literally mean utilizing the tools to engage in a constant process of knocking (to make sure that based on the sound the work can be at its best place), chiseling, and crafting. Yes, indeed, it is a laborious process, and it is even more difficult to write in a second language, as it takes a longer time to *tui qiao* and *zhuo mo*, going back and forth between languages. But, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to write and rewrite to grasp a better and deeper understanding of the experiences of my participants. This learning journey has definitely cultivated my patience. I was able to take my time to commit to this art crafting process to present the reader a full picture of the lived experiences of those Chinese international graduate students who were in my study. I am also grateful for the transformation that has occurred in myself. Through presenting this piece of text in front of my readers, the transformation can be spread to a larger community so that we may make an altogether more systematic and concerted effort to help Chinese international students find deeper meaning in their experiences.

Du Shu Bai Bian, Qi Yi Zi Xian, 读书百遍，其义自现

When I went to school in China, sometimes I did not understand what I was reading, so I would ask the teachers for advice; oftentimes, I would receive what is called the ancient wisdom: *du shu bai bian, qi yi zi xian*, 读书百遍，其义自现 which means that

the meaning of a text will appear automatically and naturally after you read it many times. As reluctant as I was, I listened to my teachers' advice, and it worked. The first time, I did not get it; the second time, I still did not get it; the third time and later on, I started to understand the meaning of the text that I had read many times more thoroughly each time than the previous time. I kept reminding myself to apply the ancient wisdom I was taught when I was repetitively studying the transcripts of conversations with my participants. I came to understand more about what my participants were trying to tell and show me of their lived experiences. Each time, those transcripts, the words of the participants themselves oriented me toward a new direction in which to open the phenomenon, so that I could help readers better understand what it is like to have a certain human experience, to help them feel *shen lin qi jing*, 身临其境. This Chinese phrase means to help them feel as if they were physically in that environment or situation, to have a personal feeling that he or she is living in some experience even if he or she had never experienced it before, or the feeling of re-living that experience if a person has lived that experience before. It is similar to the "phenomenological nod" that indicates that the text that we have read is something that "resonates with our sense of lived life" and something that "we can nod to, recognizing it as an experience that we have had or could have had" (van Manen, 1990, p. 27).

So, I've raised a question: "What is it like to be a Chinese international graduate student in the U.S.?" Since it is not a problem question, but is rather a meaning question, my intention is neither to solve a problem nor to present the reader with "a conclusive argument or with a determinate set of ideas, essences or insights" (van Manen, 2005, p. 238). My phenomenological research on the lived experience of Chinese international

graduate students is not a report; but is rather, to show the readers what I have captured of their lived experiences. It is my hope that the text conveys and evokes a life understanding that “stirs our sensibilities, pulls the strings of unity of our being,” and “speaks to us in a manner that validates our experience” (van Manen, 2005, p. 237), and makes us think and feel and unites us as beings in a certain way.

Through the course of conversing with my participants, reading numerous sources, reflecting, and writing and rewriting methodically, my understanding of Chinese international graduate students has deepened and expanded. I’ve learned about my participants’ concerns, worries, confusions, and anxieties. I’ve learned about their concerns both within and outside of classrooms, their experiences of space in the U.S., as well as their straddling between two worlds of languages, education practices, and cultures. Through hearing their voices and knowing the multiple ways in which they experience the U.S., their voices can add to our understanding and help us to find the ways we gather wisdom to come up with ideas that may further support international students on various levels.

Cross Boundaries, Care to Act

Van Manen (2006) writes, “A distinguishing feature of a human science approach to pedagogy is how the notions of theory and research are to be related to the practice of living” (p. 15). We conduct research in order to help with our practices and to influence our pedagogies. What is pedagogy? “Pedagogy is the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations” (van Manen, 2000, p. 2). As mentioned earlier, phenomenological studies ask questions on how we can take actions to connect human beings in a personal way, and how we can take better actions to improve our daily living

practices. Hopefully, my phenomenological study of Chinese international graduate study can help us with our actions and practices of supporting international students. Also, I hope that the themes that have emerged from my dissertation research can not only influence the living of Chinese international graduate students, but also those who directly work with international students, or even those have heard about international students before but never had an opportunity to interact with them. The following are the insights drawn from the themes that are relevant to our practice of being and living.

To Listen, to Know, and to Care

Ashley and Sun Quan feel that the typical American greeting/question of “How are you?” is superficial, and it is hard for them to measure the willingness of those who ask this question to listen to their response as to how they are doing. The importance of interest in listening becomes poignant and is one of the conditions for starting a conversation and getting to know one another. Oftentimes, what we desire might just be to have someone listen to us, to listen to the problems and issues that we encounter, and listen to our inner worlds. We feel that the simple act of being listened to entails that we are being cared for by others, such as spouses and families want to be listened to by another, patients want to be listened to by their doctors, and students want to be listened to by teachers. However, the importance and value of listening has somewhat been neglected in both our daily lives and educational practices/pedagogies. Listening is not just being receptive; rather, it is based on interaction, and it goes beyond words that have been said (Schultz, 2003). In our education systems, it is highly recommended that teachers listen to students.

Listening closely to students implies becoming deeply engaged in understanding what a person has to say through words, gesture, and action. Listening is fundamentally about being in a relationship to another and through this

relationship supporting change or transformation. By listening to others, the listener is called on to respond. (Schultz, 2003, p. 9)

Listening does not stop at the end of a conversation or the act of listening; rather, the point of listening is to get to know those that we are listening to, with a possibility of calling for action. In the listening process, we need to listen closely, meaning that we need to pay close attention, to respect, and to get to know our students. However, sometimes this process of getting to know one another is not easy, because the listening process requires listening beyond words, beyond what has been said, beyond individuals' frames of reference; rather, listening requires a teacher to get to know the social, cultural, and community contexts of individual students (Schultz, 2003). Since each student is different in the contexts they bring to an experience, even unfamiliar to teachers, it requires teachers to step outside of their own familiar contexts and learn about the unfamiliar perspectives of those students. As such, it is "an active process that allows us to both maintain and cross boundaries" (Schultz, 2003, p. 8). What matters most in the beginning is our willingness and effort to be involved in this listening process, to get to know the unfamiliar perspectives that are different from our own, and to have the patience within that is required to do so. That is, we need to initiate efforts to listen to our students, with the potential hope that the act of listening will lead to our own action to change or to transform.

Julie's advisor made the effort and showed her willingness to listen to Julie's "international student problem" of having to renew visas every year and comply with employment restrictions while having an F-1 student visa status. Julie also expressed her unfamiliarity with American popular culture to her advisor. Afterwards, actions followed her advisor's listening:

After she found out that I did not know that much about American popular culture, she even allowed me to drop one course and do an independent study with her on American popular culture, reading literature on that, such as music and everything. I found it very interesting and useful. (Julie)

Listening contributes to knowing, and eventually can lead to action. In traditional Chinese writing, the character for listen is 聽. In this character, the left part means ear, the top right part means head, mind and brain (depends on how it is translated), and the bottom right part means heart. Taken altogether, listening is not only the utilization of the ear; rather the ear serves as the receptacle, and the information is processed by the mind and heart. Listening is a process that actively involves the heart, and it is not a passive one. Schultz (2003) suggests teachers listen as they teach, which means, “receiving information through the heart and mind in order to understand, to learn, and to act” (p. 170). Julie’s advisor accommodated Julie by helping her adjust to the U.S. academic environment, and helped her grow. Advisors’ willingness to listen to students’ problems and to allow students to catch up with what they lack knowledge in, is an indication of their effort to help students with the first-semester transition into the U.S. higher education context.

Mayeroff (1971) in *On Caring* contends that to care for someone does not simply mean good intentions or warm regard; rather, “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself” (p. 1).

To care for someone, I must *know* many things. I must *know*, for example, who the other is, what his powers and limitations are, what his needs are, and what is conducive to his growth; I must *know* how to respond to his needs, and what my own powers and limitations are. (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 9)

This *knowing* does not happen naturally or automatically. An advisor knows because she or he has an interest in listening to students’ stories, experiences, and needs. Based on

this kind of *knowing*, advisors are able to help students recognize their own abilities. This *knowing* is a process, which requires interest, willingness, patience, and effort.

Oftentimes, we do not understand one another because we do not give our time or patience to listen. International students are different from domestic American students in many ways, and that is why it requires more time and effort to listen to their voices so that we can better understand their experiences and help them with their growth. If not listened to, Chinese international students might lose interest in sharing their stories, issues, hardships, and their “international student problem” with their advisors and those who do not encounter those problems (Jacob & Greggo, 2001).

Advisors can cultivate the *knowing* of international students, by listening to, having a conversation with, and interacting with them, in order to “understand and accept” them, and to care for them (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Hopefully through that care, students can feel that they are being understood. O’Donohue (1999) writes, “When you are understood, you are at home” (p. 262). International students can be helped to feel at home in an environment where there is a concerted effort to create such “at-homeness.”

Creating A Sense of Home

Home was the safe place, the place where one could count on not being hurt. It was the place where wounds were attended to. Home was the place where the me of me mattered. Home was the place I longed for, it was not where I lived. (hooks, 2009, p. 215)

A place where a person lives does not automatically become a person’s home. To call a place one’s home, one has to long for that place, and have some emotional attachment to it. Having come to live in the U.S. does not make the land of the U.S. home for my participants, because their temporary residences are not that for which they long. What my participants long for is a place where family members reside, and where they can feel such care and love. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the emergent

themes of my participants' experiences is that they are anxious about many aspects of their daily lives, both in academic and non-academic settings, including being afraid of not being able to integrate into "Americanness," and their sense that establishing friendships with Americans is very difficult, after having attempted to do so a few times. As Ashley and Sun Quan indicated, they are not able to bring their conversations and interactions with Americans to a deeper level because they are afraid that Americans do not have the desire or genuine interest to get to know them, and that Americans do not care. What is the form of expression of our care? How do we know if someone cares for us? When would Ashley and Sun Quan know whether care is genuine or not?

When we know that someone cares for us, we feel touched, grateful, warm, safe, and at ease. A famous Chinese author, doctor, and psychologist, Bi Shumin, once had a patient with a back injury who had to be in a cast for over a month, so Bi posted a note on the back of her office door: "Call XXX patient every day." She knew that when a person could not move or go anywhere and had to stay in bed every day, that person could become very lonely. It might be helpful for her to have someone to listen to her daily, and have someone to talk to. So, Bi did call the patient every day while the patient was recovering. Later, the patient commented that she was very grateful that Dr. Bi did so, because Dr. Bi understood what she was thinking, and understood what her needs were. What Dr. Bi did was nothing profound; it was simple but such caring attentiveness demands something deep from our heart. Yes, she is a doctor, but she tried her best to think from a patient's perspective of what she would need had she been a patient at that particular time. She tried to step into the patient's shoes to seek and understand her needs.

It All Engages Our Hearts

Gadamer (1975/2011) states that if we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, we would understand that person: "If we transpose ourselves into another person's situation... we will become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person—by putting ourselves in his [sic] position" (p. 304). Bi put herself in the patient's position and discovered what the patient's needs were, which turned out not to be complicated; something as simple as a phone call was able to enhance the care she provided for her patient. A simple phone call makes us aware that someone is thinking about us, that we are not alone. A simple phone call is that small, and we might assume that everyone could do so, but it is not that easy. A simple phone call is one of the most genuine manifestations of someone's care. The form of one's care can be that simple, oftentimes through little things in life.

When I first arrived at the University in Iowa, I needed to report to my advisor first... I was thinking, advising, that's very formal, right? But she (my advisor) gave you so much advice just from conversations. I was very nervous before I talked to her, but once she opened her mouth and started talking, my nervousness was all gone. She would joke with you. She would step into your shoes and think from your perspective, for example, you need to take the shuttle to school because it is very cold here, and whether you needed coffee in the morning, it was all about daily life. You can feel it, whether a teacher seriously cares for you, rather than just simply asking, "How are you today?" She was like a mom. (Ashley)

Ashley's advisor was like a mom. So is my advisor. The first thing that comes to our mind when thinking or talking about mothers is the unconditional love from a mother. Several phrases in Chinese explicate the unconditional love from a mother: 爱心 *ai xin*, 担心 *dan xin*, 操心 *cao xin*, and 关心 *guan xin*. *Xin* 心 means heart in Chinese. The four phrases mean loving heart, worrying, thinking about everything, and caring, respectively. Just as Ashley described, caring is not being listened to or talked about; rather, it is felt.

We feel the genuine and “serious” care with our heart. Also, as mentioned earlier, all the acts of listening, understanding, and caring have an active engagement of our heart. Heart is the center of a person, the middle of a person, and the most inner. Heart is the place where love resides. When we put our heart into something or someone, we tend to see things from a different level, meeting someone at the center of their being, to try and see through their experiences, step into their shoes, and care for them, wondering whether they need anything.

To care for someone is to have concern about someone’s life, whether that person needs to take a shuttle when it is cold, or whether that person needs coffee in the morning. It is that simple and profound. As discussed earlier, to care for someone is first to guess and later to get to know the needs of that person. Ashley’s advisor was deeply aware of the needs of Ashley, that besides academic advising, what she needed was understanding, and 关心 *guan xin* from a mother, while away from home. Gadamer (1975) says that we may not be able to find the exact equivalent words in another language. *Guan xin* 关心 is the closest meaning in Chinese to the meaning of “care” brought forward here. *Guan* 关, means having something to do with, being connected, while *xin* 心 means heart. *Guan xin* 关心 is something that is connected to our hearts. *Guan xin* is creating a loving relationship with someone, such as parents *guan xin* children, lovers *guan xin* each other, friends *guan xin* one another, and teachers *guan xin* pupils.

Guan xin 关心 is to *guan xin* a person’s well-being, which requires us to *yong xin* 用心, which means with that intention in mind, we use our hearts, to pay attention, to get to know the needs of the ones whom we *guan xin*, to “step into your shoes, and think from their perspective” as Ashley describes; which means that we need to listen

attentively, with our hearts. Only with our hearts and whole self engaged in the entire experience, can we guess what might be the needs of others, and proceed to *guan xin* appropriately. It is no easy task. Sometimes, it is not that we do not have the intention to *guan xin* 关心 someone; rather, it is because we do not have the awareness of what to do or how to express *guan xin* 关心. How is it possible that Ashley could feel this kind of *guan xin* 关心 from her advisor?

I think it is relevant to her own background, because she had some international experience, especially in Asia. She could understand international students, because her husband is from the Philippines, and her son was adopted from Thailand. She did her Peace Corps in the Philippines, and she understood the psychology of international students. (Ashley)

Ashley's advisor's international experience helped to cultivate the awareness and intention to step into Ashley's shoes to understand her, to *guanxin* her. But more importantly, it is the exposure and immersion into a context out of her home element, the mindfulness and effort to navigate in a place that was foreign to her while listening to her needs that made it easier for Ashley's advisor to empathize with Ashley. It is the personal experience that made a difference in the mentoring and caring process of Ashley's advisor to her. *Guanxin* is personal. For some advisors, those personal experiences help, but those who do not have that many similar experiences, it would be helpful to ask about their own desires and needs in a more systematic and articulated way, had they been in a similar situation, away from families, friends, and support systems.

The importance of an advisor cannot be understated for any graduate student, especially for international graduate students, where advisors are considered potential sources of support for students to be able to navigate graduate school (Curtin et al., 2013). Academic advisors are the third most commonly listed support source by international students, after friends and family, and the office of international education or a similar

office (Zhai, 2004). Compared to their American peers, less sufficient support for international students in the U.S. makes advisors extremely more important for them, which also leads to international students' desire for relationships with their advisors to be based on personality and interpersonal closeness (Rose, 2005). We want an advisor not only for academic guidance and advice, but also with whom we can identify, and also with whom we can feel friendship and seek personal and life advice as well.

It would help to improve advising of international students if the university provided greater support for faculty so that more cultural sensitivity, empathy, genuine understanding, and actual care could be shown towards international students. The international experience makes the *guanxin* come more easily and naturally, as a person can understand better what it feels like to be in another country, taken out of his or her own familiarity. Mayeroff (1971) further contends that caring can be “contagious,” such as one’s care can activate the care of the other, and vice versa in a meaningful friendship (p. 26). This care begins and continues to be “contagious,” from one advisor to two advisors, three, four, and more, so that “contagious” care can enable each of us to find our place, and to be “in place” (p. 39).

Finding A Place to Belong—Place-Conscious Initiatives

As centers of experience, places *teach* us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places *make* us: As occupants of particular places within particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped. (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 621)

Place is the ground of our direct human experience. Place is “the key to understanding the nature of our relationships with each other and the world” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 622). We learn from our interactions and relationships with ourselves, one another, and the world. The essential nature of place in every single human experience

we have allows us to see ways in which “*places are pedagogical*” (p. 624). Therefore, places need to be emphasized in our pedagogies and education practices to create a place-conscious education, within which teachers and students are enabled to experience the alive nature of places in the human and more-than-human world. In such place-conscious pedagogies students find somewhere to belong. Unfortunately, the value of place has been overlooked in education (Gruenewald, 2003).

It is normal not to belong at first. Places are different and, hence, life aspects in those places can differ. It takes some time to make a transition from one place to another, where it is normal to experience aspects of life that we are not used to: different trivial details of life, such as going to the postal office, what to order in a restaurant, how to speak English in “the American way,” true immersion in classroom culture, or the difficulty of making friends with Americans. All of those “not used to” encounters are culture shocks, and it is normal to experience them as such. Being unable to do something does not entail our failure, and even if we fail, it is not uncommon, and ought to be appropriately addressed. It is normal that one does not make friends right away. It is normal that it takes longer for some individuals to adjust to the new environment than others, and it is normal that gaps exist between expectations and the reality of what the U.S. should be like. Nothing should be interpreted as failure, incapability, or not welcomed by the locals. Due to all these “not used to” experiences, some international students might feel that they have been left out, and they need to be reminded that adjustment to adversities and culture shock is common and temporary; such experiences are not fixed deficits unique to themselves or their ethnic groups (Walton & Cohen,

2011). We can help international students find their place to belong through various programs, and essentially through our genuine care.

An example of working with international students might be helpful such as in the Walton and Cohen study (2011), where a brief “intervention” was used to help students ease their anxiety in belonging socially. When students first entered college, they were asked to read testimonies from senior students. These seniors were worried about their own social belonging in the first year, but grew confident with time in their belonging. For instance, one senior student was quoted as saying:

Freshman year even though I met large numbers of people, I did not have a small group of close friends... I was pretty homesick, and I had to remind myself that making close friends takes time. Since then... I have met people some of whom are now just as close as my friends in high school were. (p. 1448)

The message conveyed from those senior students to freshmen in the study was that a difficult transition was not due to someone’s individual problems, but rather is a common and transient aspect of the college-adjustment process. In the course of three years, due to the “intervention,” those students’ GPAs increased, feelings of belonging rose, their own sense of well-being improved (shown through higher scores on the Subjective Happiness Scale), and students were healthier (shown through less frequent doctor visits). The intervention helped students to make a smooth transition to college life. The brief intervention toward enhancing social belonging created some positive effects on students’ academic and non-academic outcomes, as they encountered transition to adversity from one academic environment to another, from high school to college. With the help of the program, students made better adjustments to the new college environment and eventually found an enhanced sense of belonging in their new academic environment.

Chinese international graduate students may face more challenges than American

students in making a smooth transition to an American university and social environment. Language differences, cultural shock, difficulty in establishing friendships with American students, and the sense of disorientation in navigating themselves to a new place, were all experienced by the participants in my study. In addition, international students in general exhibit more stress and anxiety and need to expend greater efforts to overcome their challenges than domestic students in English-speaking countries (Andrade, 2006). Various research studies also show that developing a sense of belonging may be particularly difficult for international students (Andrade, 2008; Curtin et al., 2013; Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Lin & Yi, 1997; and Trice, 2004)

Perhaps similar “interventions” can be extended to international students as well, at the early stage of their academic journeys in the U.S. Institutions might work to avoid overwhelming Chinese international students making a sudden transition from the Chinese academic environment to the American university environment. Greater efforts could be made to establish more programs and improve those that exist to help students adjust academically and socially.

Besides reading and learning through testimonies from students who arrived earlier, peer support programs may aid the social adjustment of international students. For example, institutions might pair newly arrived international students with volunteer “host” students to attend various campus activities together (Abe et al., 1998), such as graduate counseling students with international students to aid social adjustment of the latter (Jacob & Greggo, 2001), domestic and international graduate students in the same major for the purpose of culture-sharing (Shigaki & Smith, 1997), or the “buddy project” described in Campbell (2012) to support newly arrived international students with host

students like that in New Zealand. Programs such as these have helped participants acquire cultural knowledge of one another, have slightly improved the academic language skills of international students, and have built foundations for establishing friendships. I remember my participation in a peer-pairing program called “OU Cousins” when I first arrived in the U.S. as an exchange student at the University of Oklahoma. I benefitted quite a lot from the program: my comfort in speaking English and stepping out of my comfort zone increased, my spoken English improved, my knowledge of the U.S. society broadened through access to my American “Cousin,” and I made friends with other “cousins” who participated in the program.

Peer support programs such as language partner programs, “buddy projects,” or the “OU Cousins” program that I participated in can all be good practices to initiate and continue on higher education institution campuses, and potentially have the effect of forging friendships and promoting intercultural understanding to help international students be seen as assets to advance learning opportunities for all students (Pandit, 2013). Programs that are seemingly only for international students actually benefit all members of a university as a whole, because we learn about the cultural and educational contexts of those students, and through comparison we learn about ourselves as well. In order to promote this learning for all students at institutional levels, we need to show our care through creating systems to value our international students, their experiences and contexts, and make sure that they are welcomed, oriented, aided, and appreciated, so that they can become valued members of our academic community. These programs can be coordinated and collaborated between different student support and academic units. Such programs can be started and implemented at international student orientation settings. If

these programs are difficult to implement at university-level orientations, it might be more doable and practical at school- or department-level orientations. International student orientations can be conducted to unravel myth expectations of students, such as “there is gold everywhere” and “everything is better” in the U.S., and present a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the U.S. to reduce any future possible disappointment and frustration (Ozturgut, 2012).

As Ashley described, American friends are the best channels through which international students may be introduced to American culture. The in-person communication and interaction should be strongly encouraged among students, as a means to complement current academic training and to help support international students outside of academic environments. The non-academic environments are where my participants indicated they encounter the most issues and problems.

Feeling lost in the university space. I served as a panelist several times at the international student orientation program at my dissertation research university to help with the cultural and academic transition for incoming international students. The panel topics, chosen by the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), mostly were relevant to academic settings, such as interaction with advisors, classroom participation, insights on academic writing, plagiarism, and so on. I do not recall, however, topics addressing expectations of the U.S., friendship establishment or social belonging, possibly due to the fact that those topics are considered personal, and a belief exists that personal items should be kept in private settings, that is, kept out of professional or academic settings. However, newly arrived students from different countries might have initial concerns that are personal, such as “it was all about survival problems:”

Survival was the thing. When I came to the U.S. for the first time, for example, I did not even know what to say in the cafeteria, that I did not even know that crispy chicken is fried. If I wanted chicken, I could only say ‘chicken.’ If they asked me ‘do you want it crispy or grilled?’ I did not know what they were talking about, so I did not know what to say. I said, “The first one.” I did not know what I ordered or was about to eat. It was pretty terrible. Later, I think if there were a food ordering line there, I felt pretty embarrassed, so I had to hide to the side and let other people order first. The first couple of months were all about survival words. Definitely I was challenged, but also threatened by that. I was only thinking about how to survive, going to school every day and having something to eat. How could I have the chance to think about “fitting in” or anything else?
(Alex)

The focus on “survival,” to have something to eat at school concerned Alex. He was fourteen years old when he first came to the U.S. When Chinese international graduate students come, they are no longer teens, but rather young adults, and we might assume that they would be more independent and mature in taking care of themselves. This is true to some extent, but the feeling of culture shock and the concern and anxiety over survival that comes along with the arrival in a new place were shared experiences, such as Joe and Evan’s imitation of others to place orders in fast food restaurants due to the lack of vocabulary.

When all a person cares about is survival, everything else becomes secondary, and the person does not have the chance or capacity to think about anything else, such as “fitting in,” as Alex depicted. All that he could think of was to obtain food and to survive.

Abraham Maslow (1943) in his classic work *A Theory of Human Motivation*, contends:

For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food. He dreams food, he remembers food, he thinks about food, he emotes only about food, he perceives only food, and he wants only food... Capacities that are not useful for this purpose lie dormant or are pushed into the background. The urge to write poetry, the desire to acquire an automobile, the interest in American history, the desire for a new pair of shoes are, in the extreme case, forgotten or become of secondary importance. (pp. 373-374)

Survival is the first priority to be taken care of among all issues for human beings. With no food or other source to keep us alive, survival becomes our primary focus and may easily become our only concern. Everything else becomes less important, for “a person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most hunger for food probably more strongly than anything else” (Maslow, 1943, p. 373). Maslow’s theory indicates the hierarchy of human needs: starting from physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, to self-actualization and self-transcendence. If the previous needs are well gratified, then it allows a new set of needs to be met, following the order mentioned above (Maslow, 1943). Concerning his “survival issue,” Alex can speak for all of us: only when the “survival issue” is solved, can we think about anything else other than food, or how to survive. Then there can be a focus on living and thriving, such as “fitting in,” longing for friendship and longing to belong.

O’Donohue (1999) in *Eternal Echoes* writes:

Longing is a quality of desire which distance or duration evokes. In other words, your longing reaches out into the distance to unite you with whatever or whomsoever your heart desires. Longing awakens when there is a feeling that someone or something is away from you. (p. 73)

The fact that Chinese international students and international students in general are far away from their families, friends, and all the familiarities back at home, evoke their longings, and “the desire to seek and to find the absent one” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 73).

Those students would feel

Keenly, as never before, the absence of friends or a sweetheart or a wife or children. [They] will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in [their] group, and [they] will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. [They] will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world and may even forget that once, when [they were] hungry, [they] sneered at love. (Maslow, 1943, p. 381)

Maslow points out that the need for love/belonging is a commonly found core in the case of maladjustment. At the beginning/early time of international students' adjustments to the new physical and cultural environment in the U.S., their longing to belong, to make friends, to seek love in general seem extremely noticeable. However, just as it takes time to adjust to a new environment, it takes time to get used to the friendship culture, to establish friendships with students from home countries as well as American students. The absence of old friends and loved ones makes students even more eager to make friends with others. Senior international students should encourage and guide newcomers during their adjustment adversities at the beginning, since they had similar experiences. Students should feel safe and free to share their personal concerns, where there is no judgment, where they can be at ease and be normal human beings. We should pay attention not only to their academic needs, but also to their needs as human beings, such as the need to survive, and the need for love/belonging. A university setting goes beyond an impersonal place for knowledge transmission, but also it is a place where people can feel free to discuss "personal" matters, such as making friends, issues, problems, and troubles that they encounter.

The Significance of a "Buffer"—Easing into Graduate Studies

I have a friend who graduated with her Master's degree last year and was about to start her doctoral study at another flagship research university in another state. Once when chatting about her Master's program study experience, she said:

I think everything is great except one part. I feel like that I jumped into the coursework without an overview or introduction to the subject field that I would be studying for the next two years, and to be honest, I still do not know how to appropriately do research.

The difficulty of graduate study is real. I used to think that only international students have issues adjusting to graduate school studies, mainly due to their language barriers. But, the friend with whom I had such a conversation was an American! The transition from undergraduate to graduate studies is not easy for Americans, let alone Chinese international students, as they face a double transition: college to graduate school, and one cultural environment to another, wherein language is highly involved due to the fact that a person needs to have the ability to communicate in both the formal educational process and within interpersonal relations.

Moderate introduction to the program. It is quite unfortunate that graduates feel that they have not acquired certain academic skills due to the fact that they “jumped” into the program with no overview or introductory course of the program. Domestic students even feel so, let alone international students, as they are encountering multiple changes: linguistically, culturally, and academically. Perhaps an overview or introductory course can be introduced so that it can help international students navigate their academic life in the midst of many unfamiliarities and newness, similar to the introductory course that Ashley took when she went to a University in Iowa for her master’s program.

Among all the three schools that Ashley had attended in the U.S. for her graduate studies, she told me that a university in Iowa was her first love and that no other schools could exceed it either academically or personally. She indicated that the very first class she took during the program was the “Introduction to Graduate Study in TESOL,” which provided her a brief introduction to her field of study, gave her an idea of what to expect in the program, taught her how to critique arguments, how to cite references to scholarly work, and how to summarize. Ashley considers these courses a solid foundation for her

academic training and preparation for coursework and assignments that were very different from her undergraduate studies in China:

The class was very useful. I was taught how to critique. I wasn't used to it at the beginning, because what we did in China was to summarize how great the author did in writing it, and you would not go to find its flaws, you only summarize the synopsis, what was good about it, or you already formed an idea that since it was already an article or appeared in the textbook, there was no such a thing that there is something wrong with it. But in that course, I was introduced to this idea that you can actually critique the author's work. That was very new to me.

The course introduced her to a way of freedom in which she found her academic voice.

The overview course not only introduced her to differences between Chinese and American academic culture, but also functioned as a segway for Ashley to ease into the demands and differences of American graduate school, serving as a *buffer*:

I did not know anything about appropriate citation. I thought you just use it in stuff, and of course I did not know anything about plagiarism. The professor at Iowa was very strict and [being] detail-oriented, and he even corrected my punctuation marks in my paper, and now I am very thankful, because it built a good foundation for me. That class was a great class, as it gave you time to buffer, helped you to make a smooth transition, not only for international students, but also for American students, who also did not know what to expect or to do in graduate school. (Ashley)

As Ashley describes, the course built a good foundation for her, and helped her get orientated in graduate school. I would recommend that similar introductions be offered to international students in particular. Some can focus more on reading and writing, while others can emphasize program writing, code running, or experiments in laboratories; for some fields, a whole semester of three credits is needed while for others, a one-credit course for a couple of months might be sufficient. For example, it might be beneficial for international students who study Education in U.S. graduate schools to take a required course on the overview of American education systems and structures, from pre-K to the higher education level, so that they can develop a better grasp of the

education environment of the country in which they currently study. I am also aware of the fact that the university where my dissertation research is conducted has special programs to help first year students with their transition into the university: living and learning communities for freshmen, and “Transfer 2 Terp Learning Community” programs for transfer students. Those programs are designed to help with students’ “survival” and are designed to help students be successful at the University (University of Maryland T2T program). It would be beneficial if similar programs can be offered and incorporated into the first semester/year program for newly arrived international students so that good transitions can be made. However, certainly “survival” is the bottom line, and it is not the ultimate goal that we as educators and education practitioners want to achieve. “Survival” is the first hurdle for many students, and we expect our students to thrive in an environment filled with “actions of care” where each and every student can feel a sense of belonging. Due to the different and special situations of international students, additional care is needed.

In addition to program introduction courses, support programs, and university wide and department level international student orientations, college/school level orientations should also be highly recommended so that international students can have a better knowledge of the different programs within the college, and the departmental connections and collaborations. The college/school level of orientation should be rather formal to acknowledge the presence of international students, facilitate interactions between international students and faculty, staff, and domestic students, to create a community where international students can find a place to belong within the larger university setting.

Cultivating a culture of “cohort” groups.

There were 7 or 8 of us in the same cohort. We almost took the same classes at the same time throughout my Master’s program, and we indeed had a good relationship with each other. (Ashley)

My cohort is pretty tight, especially the first couple of years. We pretty much chose the same classes, and we often had dinner together, but later we had to prepare for our comps and qualifying exams, so we didn’t see each other often anymore, but still we made sure that we get together once a semester. (Julie)

I never heard of or used the word “cohort” before I started my Master’s program, although I studied English as an undergraduate. Then, I heard the word mentioned sometimes from my program professors and colleagues. For some reason, despite the fact that the word was not in my vocabulary, I never went to look it up, because I sort of sensed that it meant a group of us together in the same program. Later on, the frequent reference of the word “cohort” from my dissertation participants drew my attention, and I went to trace its etymological source.

Cohort, from Middle French *cohorte*, refers to a body of infantry in the Roman army; from the Latin *Cohort-em*, *co* means together, *hort-* cognate with Greek *χόρτος*, English *garth*, *gard-en*, from a root meaning ‘to enclose.’ So, cohort means enclosure, company of soldiers, also means “group united in common cause” (*Oxford English Dictionary, & Online Etymology Dictionary*). There are some similarities in the groups united between the soldier group and graduate student group: both pass certain examinations to get to be “enclosed” in the respective group; only those in the “enclosed” group are aware of, and understand the issues and concerns of that particular group, such as the determination and perseverance needed to be both in the actual battlefield and the academic arena. For international students the sense of a cohort may be most important as they are still getting used to the academic environment of another country.

In Chinese higher education, students are arranged and assigned to different groups called “class” or 班 *ban* in Chinese, based on their majors, departments and colleges. For the first two years in college, students almost attend classes together everyday as a *ban*, and there is an advisor, which is called *fu dao yuan* 辅导员 to take care of them. *Fu dao* 辅导 means to mentor in Chinese, and the responsibility of the *fu dao yuan* is to mentor and guide students of certain classes in course selection, values, and what may be considered non-academic aspects. *Fu dao yuan* 辅导员 is usually the first person from the university side to whom students can turn to discuss their academic and/or personal lives. The concept of *ban* 班 also means that students not only learn together, but also live together with their same sex classmates in dorms on campus. *Ban* is the unit where students feel most connected to one another in the bigger university environment, where they are taken care of by *fu dao yuan*. They become friends with their classmates, and they can confide with their roommates. *Ban* is the Chinese formality of cohort, only more top-down, personal, and intimate.

When I was a college student in China, I had about five roommates within the same major. The circle of my roommates was my small home on campus, and I felt I was in a small community where we did things together and everyone looked out for one another. So, when I first came to the U.S., it took me quite a while to get used to the idea that “you are on your own,” and there was no *ban*, no *fu dao yuan*. I was, indeed, on my own. “There is no such thing called *ban* 班, and you do things on your own,” Ashley says. The campus culture is different: it is a more collective-oriented environment on Chinese campuses, while U.S. campuses are individually oriented. Chinese international students appreciate the understanding and support from their “cohorts.” Although a cohort is not

exactly the same as a *ban* in China, it is the closest in its form and nature. Maybe that is why it has been mentioned many times by my participants. When there is no existence of *ban*, anything that makes us feel connected with the school, provides us support, and makes us feel that we are part of a family where we are united for the same cause, where we can understand and be understood, where we support one another, where we can ease the pain of being away from home, and have a sense of belonging.

Being students determines that much of Chinese international students' time is devoted to their areas of study, although I mentioned earlier that most of my participants' non-academic life is spent with other Chinese students. Alex says: "There is a division between my personal life and academic life," referring to two completely different groups of people with whom he interacts: both Chinese and non-Chinese in academic/professional settings, and purely Chinese in his personal life, which means that international students need two support systems respectively. If a community of Chinese friends forms the support group for Chinese international graduate students' personal lives, a "cohort" fills the void of support group within the academic environment. The "cohort" culture, similar to the *ban* culture in Chinese university settings, may be borrowed and incorporated into U.S. academic settings, so that international students can feel a sense of belonging within a large university setting. In addition to the academic guidance and authentic care from academic advisors and faculty members, staff positions such as *fu dao yuan* can also be created to further enhance the support system for international students, so that students can have people invested in the non-academic aspects of their stay in the U.S.

Pointing To and Pointing Out

In this phenomenological dissertation, I have provided readers a description of the lived experiences of Chinese international graduate students in the U.S. In phenomenological research, there are both the *descriptive* (phenomenological) and *interpretative* (hermeneutic) elements in a description (van Manen, 2000). Gadamer (1975/2011) contends that two aspects are pertinent to interpretation: one is *pointing to* something and the other is the *pointing out* of the meaning of something. Therefore, my dissertation is not only to *point to* Chinese international graduate students' lived experiences, but also to *point out* the meaning of those experiences.

The themes that emerged in this dissertation *pointed us to* different aspects of their experiences: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality) (van Manen, 2000). The themes *pointed us to* their embrace and appreciation of the given space in the U.S., their place seeking in a new place, their straddling between two lingual and cultural worlds, which comes along with anxiety, excitement, and great effort in trying to “fit in,” which partially leads to their questioning and reflection on their own identities. My participants negotiate the terrain between their past and present, and seek familiarities in the midst of unfamiliarities. They arrived in the U.S. with certain fantasized imaginations of the U.S., only to find out that the country is quite different from their expectations. Onwards, their experiences in the U.S. are a learning process about the realities of the U.S. as well as learning about themselves. Along with the excitement of coming to a different country, there is also curiosity, confusion, and anxiety. As much as they want to live in an imagined world of familiarity, they also desire to make friends with Americans,

“Do as the Americans do,” and integrate into the American society. They fumble, they stumble, yet they still keep running, as vividly described in Julie’s blog. The *meaning-pointing-out* is still an ongoing and open process, as this dissertation is presented to readers.

As mentioned earlier, I started off with a general question: “What is it like to be a Chinese international graduate student in the U.S.?” It is a meaning question to bring forward openness. Rounds of conversations with each participant prompted me to ask more questions about their unique and individualized experiences. Many topics and subjects came up in our conversations: some were expected, while some not so much, and vice versa. Resonating with my own experience and what I had heard from some participants in my preliminary research, I expected loneliness to be something that everyone would inevitably experience; however it was not the case. Only Poem and Julie expressed their loneliness caused by the lengthy process of pursuing a doctoral degree away from family and friends. As thrilled as I was to come to the U.S. to pursue my dreams, I assumed that all my participants would be willing to strike their roots and settle down in the U.S. permanently. However, I surprisingly found out about Julie’s reluctance to raise her children in the U.S., since they would be growing up as “Asian Americans” instead of “Americans,” based on Julie’s observation and perception of the U.S. The openness brought forward by the asking of a meaning question, “What is it like to be an Chinese international graduate student in the U.S.?” leads to the openness of ideas, dialogues, discussions, and pedagogical insights, to further influence our acts, including future research.

Future Research Interests

True questioning brings forth openness, and infinite possibilities, and opens up space for ongoing discussion, discovery, meaning making and insight. The closure of my dissertation writing does not entail the completion of research for me. As I was conversing with Evan, he strongly encouraged me to do research on Chinese international graduate students in the Business School at the University, as he sees it as a phenomenon worthy of study:

I think you should totally study Chinese international students in the Business School here, especially in the fields of accounting and finance. I think they can be totally different from the rest of us (Chinese students), and they might have totally different experiences here. You know why? Not only do they communicate in Mandarin, but also they can communicate in local dialects.

In China, if someone can communicate in a local dialect with another person, it probably means they come from places that are very close by. I was aware that Evan exaggerated slightly when he said that, but that further reminded me of the predominant Chinese population in the school of Business at the university. Perhaps Evan is right about their being different from the rest of Chinese international students at this university: not only people with whom they interact with outside of their academic environments are Chinese, but also those who go to classes with them are also Chinese. I remember an American friend one time joked with me saying that she felt that she was the only foreign student walking into a classroom full of “foreigners” in the business classes. In a sense, they have left China, but in the meanwhile, it is as if that they never left China. They might be living in a more isolated environment than some other Chinese international students. So, it might be a subset of Chinese international graduate students that I want to study as well. I would like to focus on their experience of living in a rather isolated Chinese community while being immersed in the American environment. I would want to explore how the

“Chinese environment” within the “American environment” influences and impacts their experiences and understanding of the U.S.

If time allows, I would like to study more participants in order to grasp a deeper understanding of lived experiences of Chinese international students. In my future research, I would like to conduct research on both Chinese graduate and undergraduate students, since their experiences might differ in various aspects. Financially, Chinese undergraduate students contribute quite significantly to U.S. higher education tuition revenue (Yu, 2013). Academically, compared to graduate students, most undergraduate students’ learning experiences take place in classroom interactions by primarily attending classes. Socially and personally, attending classes in different disciplines provides undergrads with the condition of more interaction with different groups of students and hence potential friendship building, as well as more opportunities for students’ involvement and participation in organizations and clubs. Yet again, all those above might be my presumptions of the difference between the lived experiences of Chinese graduate and undergraduate international students. I think further research on both groups would be necessary and valuable to find out what the actual differences might be, as well as the necessary supports that might help make their stay in the U.S. more fulfilling.

In addition, I would like to study the lived experience of international students from various national, social, and cultural backgrounds. During my graduate study and dissertation research process, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with many international students from other countries, as well. I find that some of their comments, which partially reflect their U.S. experience, are similar to, yet different from, Chinese students. Since many universities are exerting efforts to recruit and increase the

enrolment of international students, I find that it might be helpful to present a picture of their lived experiences to serve as sources from which more pedagogical recommendations and insights can be drawn to serve the international student population better. I hope to carry the openness forward to search for the meaning of being international students, and continue searching for the meaning of being human beings, in general.

Space and Time Revisited

As noted earlier, the emergent themes of this dissertation revolve around the four existentials: *lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relations*. As my participants experienced a different sense of space and time and interacted with the world around them, they learned more about themselves, as well as to negotiate and navigate their identities. As mentioned earlier, identity is never static; rather, it is a dynamic process with changes involved. Changes have taken place in many respects for my participants; who they are today is different from who they were when they first arrived in the U.S. These four existentials compose the basic structure of the lived experiences of my participants and help us to understand this changed process of living. However, due to the nature of and the interrelations among the four, I focused on space and time. Regardless of who we are, with whom and which we interact, place is present. In the meanwhile, time is actually “a place—its own kind of place” (Casey, 2009, p. 19).

Place situates time by giving it a local habitation. Time arises *from* places and passes (away) *between* them. It also vanishes *into* places at its edges and *as* its edges. For the “positions” of time are its effective limits, without which it would not appear as time at all—indeed, without which time itself would not be able to present itself to us, would not be timelike or temporal in the first place. (Casey, p. 21)

To discuss time is to further discuss place, as there is no time without place. That is, “the indispensability of place is evident, then, in the disparate instances of rhetoric and number, God and creation, time and mind” (Casey, 2009, p. 21). Time and space became the key aspects from which my participants experience the U.S.

I dug into the juxtaposition of my participants’ past and present, their familiar home environment and the new environment to be called home in the U.S., to realize that the journey within the U.S. comes along with anxiety as well as excitement. Between the known and unknown, from disoriented to oriented, my participants seek to find their own place and to establish a sense of belonging in a foreign land. The sense of belonging can be associated with the lived time that my participants experienced in the U.S. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Four, the duration of my participants’ stay in the U.S. varied from ten months to about seven years at the time that my conversations with them took place. For instance, when asked about his experience in the U.S., Evan mentioned his curiosity, his excitement about the new environment, along with some discomfort in the midst of newness and the unknown. The remaining participants touched upon long-term life planning, and their intention and effort to build a community where they could feel at home. The duration of lived time can directly impact their lived experiences in the U.S., such as having more opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of American society, as well as understanding themselves better. For instance, it is not uncommon to hear a newly arrived person in a new place discussing maladjustment and a sense of displacement, and a lack of belonging.

Place is something we experience, and experience has its etymological origin of “trying out,” “making a trial out of” (Casey, 2009, p. 30). As Dewey emphasized, to have

an experience is to have a trial, an experiment, out of living (as cited in Casey, 2009, p. 30). Therefore, being in a place, “what matters the most is the experience of *being* in that place and, more particularly, *becoming part of the place*” (Casey, p. 33). Becoming part of a place that is not home is never easy for anyone. The sense of “perpetual foreigner,” “outsider,” and “resident alien” is very strong among my participants. To become part of a place is to become part of the culture of that place, as every place is “encultured” and hence social (Casey). To become part of a culture is to get over the fact that one is *displaced*, i.e., one has lost a place in which one used to be at home, and overcome the nostalgia that prevents one from becoming part of the new place. It is a journey from *displacement to implacement*, “an ongoing cultural process with an experimental edge” (Casey, p. 31).

As nonnatives in the U.S., my participants have lost their place, and are experiencing “the most dangerous displacement—that from the homeland” (Casey, 2009, p. 302). Many symptoms come along with displacement—nostalgia, loneliness, sense of emptiness, and sense of placelessness (Casey). A profound sense of placelessness in a new society may lead to profound despair. However, it is very difficult for Chinese international graduate students to return to the home country for a visit on a frequent basis, due to various reasons: research, time constraint, financial reasons, and so on. The only way out of this possible despair is through re-inhabitation of another sort, which is what hooks (1990) in *Homeplace: A Site of Resistance* recommends: *re-inhabit the homeplace*, even if it is located in a foreign country. International students need to start the *inhabitation* in the new place. Therefore, it is necessary for them to get in contact with

the new place, so that the place “can serve to implace them, to anchor and orient them” (Casey, p. 23).

As mentioned previously, orientation leads us to a consideration of a body’s concrete role in place (Casey, 2009). Orientation helps us find our way in a place, to discover, and to achieve “better acquaintance” with a place (Casey, p. 121). Orientation helps us settle in, eventually to be “implaced,” and to find ourselves at home. Questions, concerns and anxieties of my participants indicate that they are not at home. Casey states, “*At home*, we do not usually have to confront such questions as ‘Where am I?’ ‘Where is my next meal coming from?’ or ‘Do I have any friends in the world?’” (p. 121) It is rare that a person feels at home right away in a new environment in the midst of unfamiliarity and the unknown. It is also rare that a person can become implaced in a new place with no contact or assistance from the people in that place, as becoming implaced is an ongoing cultural process. That is why a concerted effort is needed to emphasize the importance of a place-conscious pedagogy through our care to make the experiences of international students more self-oriented and fulfilling:

In becoming implaced, we emerge into a larger world of burgeoning experience, not only by ourselves but also with others. (Casey, p. 111)

Yet, there is still a long journey ahead of us.

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear Participant,

My name is Yali Pan, a doctoral student in International Education Policy at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am an international student from China. As I continue to study and live in the United States, I often pause to think and reflect on my own experiences in the U.S. This pause has led to my curiosity of studying the lived experiences of other Chinese international students, and you are one of them. I plan to write my dissertation on this study, and my research question is: What are the lived experiences of Chinese international students living in the United States?

I would like to have two conversations with you, with each lasting about 60-90 minutes. The conversations will be scheduled according to your availability. Following each conversation, I will ask you to read a transcript of the previous meeting to make any necessary changes or further explore your thoughts and experiences previously shared. Additionally, at the conclusion of each one-on-one meeting, you will be asked to share your most unforgettable/ memorable moments of your experiences in the United States. After the two conversations, you will be asked to join a group conversation with my other participants in the end.

All of our conversations will be audiotaped, and my advisor Dr. Hultgren and I, will be the only people who have access to them. In order to protect your confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym rather than your real name in my writing, and I will take all measures necessary to ensure your confidentiality.

Thank you for considering my request. I am very passionate about my study, as I think your experiences are invaluable and serve as a bridge between educational research and intercultural understanding in such a globalized and more interconnected world. I hope that this research leads you to a greater understanding of your own experience as a Chinese international student. Moreover, I hope that in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the experiences of international students.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me at yaliorama@gmail.com or 202.203.9808.

Sincerely,

Yali Pan, Ph.D. Candidate
International Education Policy, University of Maryland

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Project Title	Transcendence of Time and Space---The Lived Experiences of Chinese International Students in the U.S.
Purpose of the Study	<p>This research is being conducted by Yali Pan at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a self-identified Chinese international student in the U.S. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the human lived experience of Chinese international students in the U.S. We will do our best to maintain the anonymity of participants with protective files, pseudonyms and only allowing the principal investigator and her advisor access to them.</p>
Procedures	<p>The research process will take place over four months, and the procedures involve two individual interviews (one-on-one) and one group meeting with all participants.</p> <p>Individual interviews will take place first. After the first interview, you will be given one to two weeks to do a reflective writing exercise about your experience as a Chinese international student in the U.S (feel free to describe your experience in many forms, such as metaphor, drawing, poems, lyrics, music, or art). This writing is required and part of the interview procedures. The topic of the writing will be on aspects of your experiences that we did not cover in the first conversation that might also be better to share in writing, or your most unforgettable memories in the U.S.</p> <p>In addition to the requested writing, you can opt to share your existent writings with the investigator (me), such as journals, diaries, or blogs.</p> <p>There will be one group interview after all the individual interviews are conducted. Since my participants are relatively close to one another in the same region, I expect all six of my participants can be present for the group interview, or at least the majority, in case of last minute cancellations.</p> <p>I, Yali Pan will conduct the interviews at a time and location that is mutually convenient for both of us. Each interview should last about one hour. The interview will be conversational in nature and will explore your specific experience of being a Chinese international student in the U.S. All meetings will be audio taped. The interviewer</p>

	<p>will take handwritten notes. The topic for each of the meetings will be those experiences of being Chinese international students in the U.S. Sample questions include but are not limited to: What drew and motivated you to come to the U.S. to study? What did it feel like when you first came to the U.S.? What is the most shocking/exciting/unhappy moments that you have had since you came? What are the cultural differences or adaptation issues that you encounter? Do you view yourself different and how? Has your experience of studying in the U.S. changed/influenced you?</p>
<p>Potential Risks and Discomforts</p>	<p>There are possible risks in this study. You may disclose personal information (i.e. ‘stories’ or personal anecdotes) related to your experiences as Chinese international students in the U.S. during the course of this study. You will be asked to face some sensitive issues of race, age, ethnicity, culture, and loneliness. You may experience feelings of discomfort as a result of being audio taped. Allowing participants to review audio-taped discussions and conversations to make additions, corrections, and/or deletions at any time should do much to reduce the risk of discomfort. Audio-tapings and video tapings may be reviewed by participants after completion. You are encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.</p> <p>During the group interview, there might be possible risk of disclosing some individual personal information to the group. In order to reduce this risk to minimum, the investigator will consult with each individual (you) before the group interview concerning what can/cannot be shared with the group.</p>
<p>Potential Benefits</p>	<p>There are no direct benefits; however, potential benefits to this research include a greater understanding of your own experiences as a Chinese international student. We hope that in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the experiences of Chinese international students.</p>

<p>Confidentiality</p>	<p>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, the confidentiality of the participants' identities will be accomplished through several means. (1) Names of participants will not be included on collected data. You will be asked to offer a single fictional name which will be used in all documents; a written key connecting the participants' real names to their self-assigned pseudonyms will be used; (2) All collected material and information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet; this material includes the key with participants real names and pseudonyms; (3) electronic files will be secured on a private computer using password-protected computer files; (4) consent forms will be separated from material by participants. Only the principal investigator and her advisor will have access to the material collected.</p> <p>However, the researcher cannot guarantee complete confidentiality in the group interview, as information will be shared with other participants. But in order to protect participants' confidentiality, I will consult with each individual (you) concerning what can/cannot be shared with other participants.</p> <p>___ I agree to be [audiotaped] during my participation in this study.</p> <p>___ I do not agree to be [audiotaped] during my participation in this study.</p> <p>In addition, collected data such as transcriptions and audiotapes will be kept for ten years then destroyed. Written data will be shredded, computer data will be deleted, and audiotapes will be erased.</p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
<p>Medical Treatment</p>	<p><i>The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.</i></p>
<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p>

	<p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</i></p> <p>Dr. Francine Hultgren Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership 2311B Benjamin Building University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 301-405-4501 fh@umd.edu</p> <p>Yali Pan 6700 Belcrest Road, Apt. 515 Hyattsville, MD 20782 202-203-9808 yalip@umd.edu yaliorama@gmail.com</p>	
Participant Rights	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	<p>NAME OF SUBJECT</p> <p>[Please Print]</p>	
	<p>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</p>	
	<p>DATE</p>	

APPENDIX C: REFLECTIVE WRITING EXERCISE

Before our next meeting, please take time to freely and briefly write about your the most unforgettable/memorable moments of your experience in the United States. You have one to two weeks after our first meeting to do this exercise.

Your writing is very helpful for me to gain a deeper understanding of your experience as a Chinese international student in the U.S. Please feel free to use your imagination, use metaphors, drawings, poems, even music to help me to understand your experience. In addition, if you are willing to share your previous writings on your lived experience, please feel free to provide me those, such as your journals, diaries, or blogs. I understand that those information are very personal, and I respect your privacy, only if you are willing to share. I promise I will be the only person who has access to those information and will not share your writing with anyone else.

You can either provide a handwritten or typed response. Once completed, please contact me through email (yaliorama@gmail.com) or by phone (202-203-9808) so we can further discuss your experiences either via email, online chatting, phone calls, or conversation as well.

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