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Acculturation Stress, Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustment, and Development of American Adolescents: A Qualitative Study of Newton High School Exchange Students in China

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ACCULTURATION STRESS, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL
ADJUSTMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY OF NEWTON HIGH SCHOOL EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN
CHINA

A Dissertation Presented

By

BINBIN ZHU

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2016

College of Education

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DEDICATION

To my father.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Andrew Effrat, for his many years of thoughtful, patient guidance, encouragement and support. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the members of my committee, Kathryn McDermott and Ellen Pader, for their helpful comments and suggestions on all stages of this project. Together their friendship and selfless contribution to my professional development have been invaluable and will forever be appreciated.

I wish to express my appreciation to all the individuals who volunteered their participation in this project. A Special thanks to Donna Fong and Michael Kozuch for their efforts in helping recruit the participants. Thank you to Eli Damon for his tireless efforts in transcribing all the interviews for this project.

A special thank you to all those who were there for me when I was facing challenging times in life. Your warmth and compassion will be always in my mind and encourage me to give, to move forward.

ABSTRACT

**ACCULTURATION STRESS, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL
ADJUSTMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF NEWTON HIGH SCHOOL EXCHANGE
STUDENTS IN CHINA**

SEPTEMBER 2016

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Theories from the extant acculturation literature functioned to categorize international students' adaptation experiences and predict their acculturation outcomes. Also, relevant studies focused mainly on students at the tertiary level. For adolescent students seeking self-development toward independence and autonomy, how they negotiated their identity challenges and tensions in a cross-cultural context, and how surrounding others in their socialization impacted on their psychosocial adjustment process and transformative experiences have not been actively explored. This qualitative study approached adolescent students' acculturation as an integrated development and learning process to explore the effects of developmental and cultural factors on their cross-cultural adaptation, especially examined their homestay experiences and student-host family relationships. It revealed how the surrounding others, through social interactions, impacted students for possible behaviors changes. Particularly, through in-

depth interviews, it provided an insider aspect of how daily interactions amplified students' different expectation into confusion and misunderstanding, and how they negotiated and reconciled the confusion and misunderstanding to create meaningful everyday activities, and over time, their shifting behaviors ensued. It is hoped that by shedding some light on self-resilience of adolescent students, and revealing their acculturative stresses and help-seeking behaviors, their emotional and social needs in their adjustment process might be better served.

Keywords Adolescent students, social interaction, psychosocial adjustment

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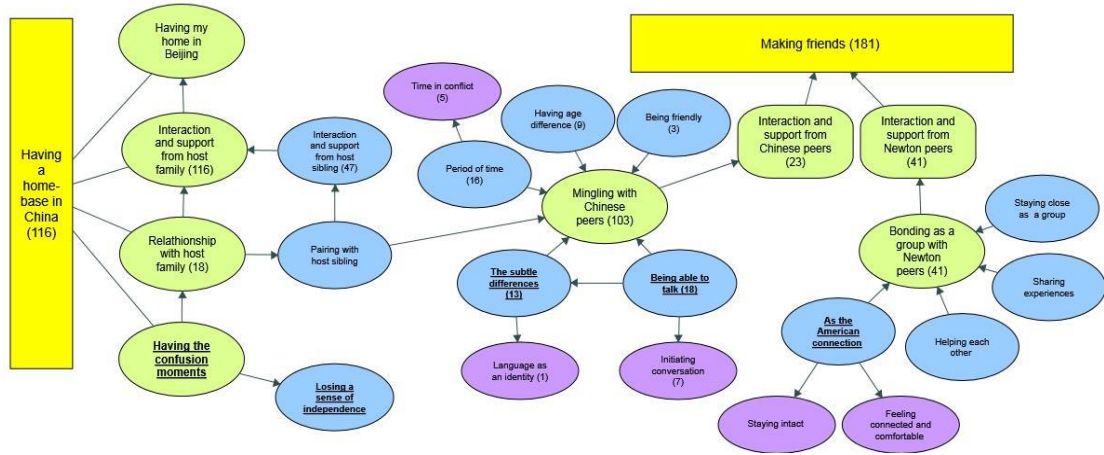


Figure 3: Theoretical coding _ the acculturation process

Figure 3 shows one of the three subthemes as the acculturation process that is supported by identified categories of participants' experiences within and across the exchange groups.

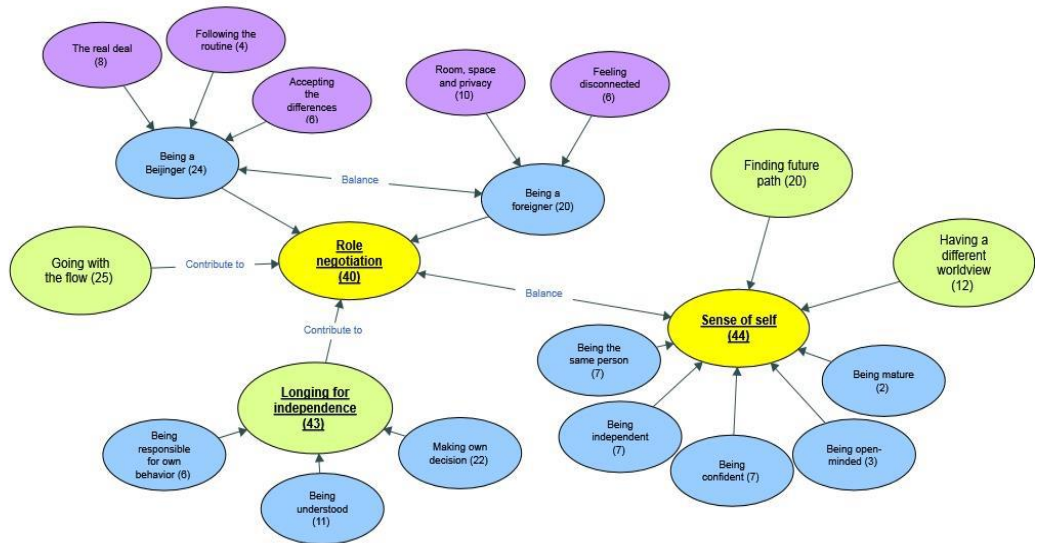


Figure 4: Theoretical coding _ the developmental process

Figure 4 shows one of the three subthemes as the developmental process that is supported by identified categories of participants' experiences within and across the exchange groups.

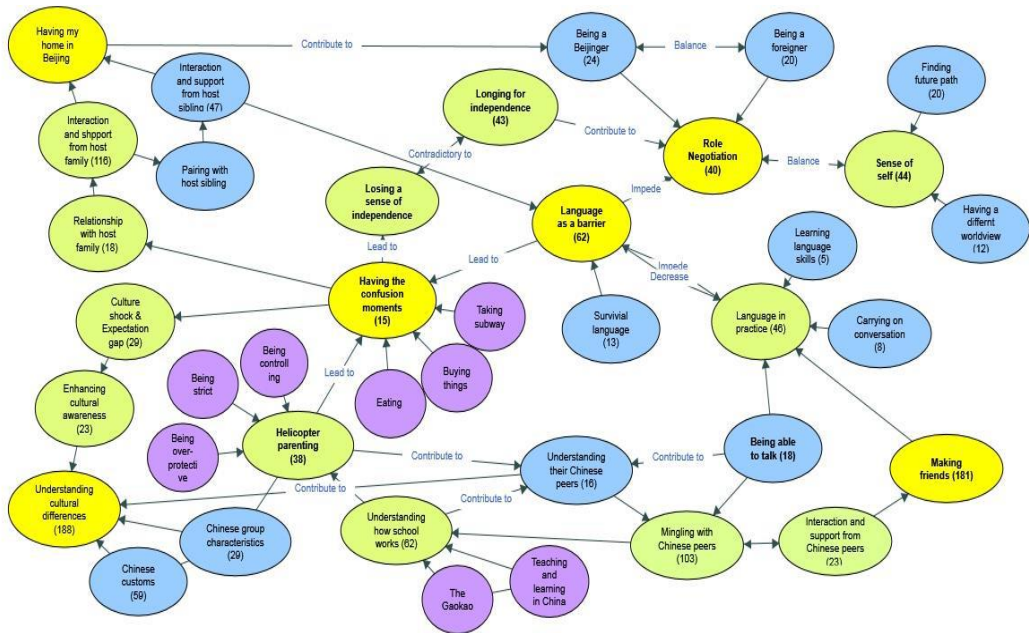


Figure 5: The interactive analytic process

Figure 5 shows the interactive analytic process where categories were grouped with their dimensions and properties, and also became connected to other categories as a part of a larger whole. They were rearranged hierarchically and horizontally to create a theoretical account of the themes.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Research Problem

Study abroad programs are regarded as strategies not only for enhancing “the knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world” (AFS Intercultural Programs¹, 2003), but also for developing students’ “technological and global literacy skills to be competitive” in the interdependent and global economy (U.S. Department of State², 2006). By 2014, the number of students studying worldwide has increased more than threefold, from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 4.5 million, representing an average annual growth rate of almost 6% and reflecting the globalization of economies and societies (OECD³, 2013⁴). Unlike immigrants who permanently migrate to another society and who likely experience a psychological need to become part of the host culture, international students are sojourners living in a foreign academic setting temporarily for their educational achievement, and plan to return to their home countries eventually (Sakurako, 2000).

Recently, the number of international students going to study outside of the traditional Western European countries has been increasing. Among the non-traditional

¹ AFS Intercultural Program (2003). What we do. Available at http://www.afs.org/afs_or/view/what_we_do. (Accessed July 19, 2007).

² U.S. Department of State (2006). Remarks to American Council on Education: A Strategic View of Study Abroad. Available at <http://www.state.gov/r/us/77629.htm>. (Accessed June 28, 2007.)

³ The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international economic organization of 34 countries founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.

⁴ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2013). “*Education Indicators in Focus*”. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/EDIF%202013--N%C2%B014%20\(eng\)-Final.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/EDIF%202013--N%C2%B014%20(eng)-Final.pdf)

study destinations, China has risen steadily over the past decade as the 3rd top host destination worldwide for a significant influx of international students (IIE Project Atlas, 2013⁵). The number of U.S. students studying in China has increased by over 500% in the past ten years and there were 14,887 U.S. students who participated in education abroad activities in China in 2011/12 (IIE Open Doors, 2013). This surge of interest in studying in China is due to China's rich cultural heritage, fast-growing economy, flexible study programs, good study environment, low cost of living and funding opportunities (Yang, *Study in China: A world of opportunity*, IIE Passport⁶, 2011).

Among these study abroad students, secondary school students are becoming the fastest growing group in many western countries, participating in various student exchange programs, i.e., short-term (summer or eight weeks or less), mid-length (one or two quarters or one semester), or long-term (academic or calendar year) (Hernandez, *et al.*, 2008). While studying in host schools and living with host families, the participating students have their "continuous and dynamic" social interactions with the locals (Sam & Oppedal, 2002). These direct contacts and communications may help students recognize how their own cultural norms differ from those of the locals, enhance their cultural awareness (Roberts, 1998) and change their stereotypes (Stangor, *et al.*, 1994).

Studies have suggested that international students have a noticeable process of transformation in their values, beliefs, and behaviors (Naylor, 1996). Moving to cultures that are different from their own, students have new learning opportunities to expand worldviews (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), develop cross-cultural competence (e.g.,

⁵ Institute of International Education. (2013). "Trend and Global Data 2013." *Project Atlas*. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Project-Atlas>

⁶ IIE Passport is the premier resource for U.S. students seeking international study opportunities that meet their goals.

Kim, 1987), grow in independence and maturity (e.g., Kwak, 2010), and graduate at higher rates and with better preparation for college and the workplace (Naylor, 1996). They may also encounter potential adjustment difficulties (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward, *et al.*, 2001; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Furnham & Bochner, 1982) and experience stress from life changes (Berry, 2006). These problems may result in unsatisfying relations with host nationals, weak host country identification, poor host language proficiency (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000; Ward & Kennedy, 1994), delinquency and academic failure (Bush, *et al.*, 2002), low self-esteem and high anxiety or depression (Farver, *et al.*, 2002), and consequently poor adjustment to the host culture (e.g., Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002).

However, for students in their adolescent years and at their formative stage (Phinney, 1992), certain aspects of their acculturation may be unique in their developmental process (e.g., Sam & Oppedal, 2004, 2002). Although there are a few studies that have shown the different adolescent adaptation process from other acculturating groups (Umaña-Taylor, *et al.*, 2002), such as studies of student friendship networks in the host country and student satisfaction with life abroad (Sam, 2001), about this age group, little is known (Neto, 2009).

From the developmental perspective, researchers proposed to understand adolescent acculturation process as “a developmental process” toward adaptation and gaining cultural competency within the host cultural setting (Sam & Oppedal, 2004, p. 482). The acculturation process, rather than being a parallel process to adolescent development, is an “integral” part of it. Acculturation changes are “by nature” developmental changes (Sam & Oppedal, 2002) that “rupture the continuity of

experience” of adolescents’ “previous sociocultural context and the adaptations that ensue” (Rogler, 1994, p. 701).

Moreover, it is suggested that parenting styles and practices have been consistently shown to play an indispensable role in understanding adolescent adaptation and development (Kwak, 2010; Wang & Ollendick, 2001; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Szapocznik, *et al.*, 1986; Baumrind, 1983), and that there is a strong influence of parenting values, goals and practices on their children’s value orientations, attitudes and adjustment (Phalet & Schönflug, 2001; Goodnow, 1988). Research has shown that adolescent international students’ retention of their ethnic cultural values, beliefs and behaviors positively contributed to their adjustment and psychological well-being in cross-cultural settings (e.g., Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Szapocznik, *et al.*, 1986). In the absence of parental guidance and protection, adolescent international students were particularly vulnerable to isolation and loneliness in the host culture (Lin, 1992).

However, the existing literature about the effects of developmental and cultural factors on the cross-cultural adaptation of adolescent international students is rarely studied in acculturation research (Yoon, *et al.*, 2008; Kuo & Roysircar, G., 2006). In particular, how adolescents’ ethnic cultural values, beliefs and behaviors influenced their social interactions in the host culture, how they negotiated their acculturative stress, their emotional and developmental needs in daily activities, and acquired their understanding of cultural differences and maintained their self-identity is less systematically studied.

1.2 Existing Literature that has Addressed the Problem

1.2.1 Acculturation Theory

Anthropologists Redfield *et al.* (1936) proposed the classical definition that acculturation encompassed changes in original cultural patterns that occur as a result of “continuous first-hand contact” among groups of individuals of different cultures. However, this definition did not address how individuals from different cultures accommodate to the new cultural context. Cross-cultural psychologist, Berry, expanded the view of acculturation as a dynamic process to adapt to stress and to develop coping mechanisms in response to stress (Berry & Sam, 1997). In Berry’s definition (1980), acculturation is a bi-dimensional process of cultural change, a dynamic process of intergroup contact with multiple outcomes in which individuals have a choice to decide which direction or how far they are willing to go in their acculturation process. When individuals from one culture are in contact with a host culture, they “adopt characteristics of the mainstream culture and retain or relinquish traits of their traditional background” (Salabarría-Pena, *et al.*, 2001, p. 662).

Using the attitudinal dimensions, Berry identified four acculturation strategies as assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. The assimilation strategy was classified when individuals do not want to maintain their heritage culture, but pursue and participate in the larger society, and look for daily encounters and interactions with the host culture. The separation alternative would be when individuals hold tightly their own ethnic culture and avoid involving with other cultural groups. The integration strategy was classified when an individual shows an interest in maintaining one’s heritage culture, and at the same time wants to contact and participate in the host society. And the

marginalization strategy, partly as the result of heritage culture loss in the acculturation process, would be when individuals have little interest in heritage culture maintenance, or as the result of exclusion or discrimination from the dominant social groups, individuals show little interest in interacting with other cultural groups in the host society (Berry, 1997, 1987, 1980, 1974, 1970).

Responding to life events that are rooted in intercultural contact and the interaction between cultures, individuals may encounter physical, social and psychological problems, and experience acculturative stress (Berry, 2006, 2005). Acculturative stress is a distinctive type of stress when individuals confront different cultural values, beliefs, and social norms, and experience a reduction in their health status relating to psychological, somatic and social aspects (Hovey, 2000; Berry, *et al.*, 1987). Individuals utilize acculturation strategies to negotiate in their daily interactions in the new cultural setting (Bochner, 1972), and achieve their “relatively stable changes”, i.e., their adaptation to the “external demands” in the host society (Berry, 2006, p. 52).

The notion of adaptation was exemplified and expanded between psychological and sociocultural adaptations (Ward *et al.*, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward, 1999, 1996). Psychological adaptation is based on affective responses such as individuals’ psychological and physical well-being or satisfaction in their cultural transition, and is strongly affected by personality, life change events and available social support (Ward & Kennedy, 1992; Searle & Ward, 1990). Sociocultural adaptation is based on behavioral responses that refer to how well individuals could manage their daily intercultural encounters, and acquire their cultural learning and social skills, and is more dependent on factors such as length of residence in the host culture (Ward & Kenney, 1996b), cultural

distance (Searle & Ward, 1990; Furnham & Bochner, 1982), contact with nationals and language ability (Ward, 1996).

1.2.2 Cultural Learning Theory

The assumption that cross-cultural individuals may have difficulties managing their daily social interactions and interpersonal behaviors, and need to learn culture-specific skills to negotiate the new cultural milieu (Bochner, 1986, 1972) was further developed by Ward and her colleagues. They suggested cultural learning as the process in which individuals engaged in intercultural contact with the hosts and progressed towards their sociocultural adaptation, that is, individuals negotiated interactive aspects of the host environment, acquire culturally appropriate behaviors and “fit in” the new cultural context (e.g., Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Searle & Ward, 1990). Especially, language proficiency and cross-cultural communication competency are at the core of the cultural learning process (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

Studies have demonstrated the positive impact of social interactions on international students (Lassegard, 2008), that the close relationships with host nationals contributed to their emotional benefits and cultural learning (Ward, *et al.*, 2001), and students had fewer academic problems (Pruitt, 1978), fewer social difficulties (Ward & Kennedy, 1993a), greater acculturation satisfaction (Rohrlic & martin, 1991), and good social-cultural adaptation (e.g., Tsang, 2001; Hammer, 1987). Also, their intercultural interactions helped them change their stereotypes of other nationalities (Stangor, *et al.*, 1994), have a noticeable process of transformation in their values, beliefs, and behaviors

resulting from diverse culture interactions (Naylor, 1996), and expand worldviews (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001).

Leong (2007) designed a longitudinal study to compare two samples of Singaporean undergraduates, with one group participating in an international exchange program and the other group staying at the home country. To examine the transition process, the two groups were concurrently surveyed at two time periods, one month before departure, and approximately 2-3 months during the exchange program. Students from the exchange group scored higher in their intercultural competency, and their increased intercultural competencies predicted better intercultural adaptation and a reduction in both socio-cultural and psychological difficulties. In line with empirical literature on interpersonal initiatives that social initiative is to facilitate interpersonal communication and establish rapport with the locals, students' social communication helped manage uncertainties in intercultural transition, and explore alternate solutions to solving their socio-cultural and psychological problems in daily interactions.

In particular, being relevant to perform daily tasks and establish interpersonal relationships, language proficiency enabled the "breadth and depth" of conversation and contributed to the intimate communication and shared understandings (Sias, *et al.*, 2008, p.10). Individuals' increased language competence would improve their ability to participate in various intercultural activities, and provide them with means to establish interpersonal relationships and social support that have been shown to facilitate their cultural learning and sociocultural adjustment (Yu, 2010; Ward, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 1993a). And all of which in turn, would further increase their conversing confidence with

more ease and less embarrassment (Hayes & Ling, 1994; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985), and proficiency in the host language (Clement, Noels & Deneault, 2001; Ward, 1996).

Moreover, studies have suggested the impact of the cultural distance on intercultural communication competence (Redmond, 2000), social relationships (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) and adjustment outcomes (Waxin, 2004). Cultural distance has been defined as the perceived similarities and differences between culture of origin and culture of contact (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). The greater the difference between the host and the home cultures, the more individuals might have problems in developing and maintaining relationships, communicating effectively, and having social integration with host nationals (Redmond, 2000).

With a sample of 359 international students in the United States from Europe, Asia, Central/Latin America and Africa, research by Yeh and Inose (2003) has shown that international students from Asia, Central/Latin America, and Africa experienced more acculturative stress than their counterparts from Europe. European and American societies have less of a contrast in cultural patterns of behavior and value systems. These cultural similarities may help European students to predict and explain host behaviors more accurately, thus reduce their anxiety and stress, and benefit them to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships with the locals (Redmond, 2000). Whereas, students from Asia, Central/Latin America, and Africa had larger perceived cultural differences that may increase the tension of communication and impede them from social integration.

1.2.3 Social Identification Theory

Social identification theory is largely influenced by Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory and Deaux's (1996) self-theory with the assumption that cross-cultural transition may involve changes in ethnic or cultural identity, intergroup perceptions and relations. For adolescent students in their acculturation process, they can be seen as trying to negotiate and balance the maintenance of their ethnic cultural values that are transmitted from parents in parent-adolescent socialization and the adaptation of host cultural values from the host nation through peer influence and other external factors (e.g., Ying, 2007; Phinney & Ong, 2002; Lee & Zhan, 1998).

Adolescent students are developing toward their physiological, cognitive and psychological maturation (Ying, 2007) and striving for independence and self-actualization (Clark & Ladd, 2000). Family, as one of the most influential contexts for their development (Maccoby, 1992), provides them the opportunity to act within the familial context such that the warm and supportive family environment enables adolescents to gain independence and control over their lives (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1987; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986).

In the family, "what children need to learn" about values and ideas of their ethnic culture and "the methods considered best for teaching them" are passed down from parents as ethnic cultural knowledge (Fontes, 2002, p. 33). It is through this natural process of "intergenerational transmission of culture" within the supportive familial context (Vedder, *et al.*, 2006) that the children start to explore their ethnicity and its meaningfulness in their lives. They significantly identify with their family members (Sam & Oppedal, 2002; Phinney, 1992), learn and understand the ways and manners of their

ethnic culture, and internalize their ethnic cultural beliefs and values (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004; Spradley, 1979). Also, the parental support and acceptance support adolescents to “venture” beyond family boundaries, and explore “various domains of cultural practices” to cultivate their self-construction (Raeff, 2006), elevate their “perception of self-growth and competence” (Coopersmith, 1967) and form their identity to adapt to the surrounding environment (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004; Cheng & Kuo, 2000; Parke & Buriel, 1998).

In the social context of the host country, individuals have to manage the uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other and its relationship, and develop a sense of personal control over stressful situations (Apker & Ray, 2003; Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Although it might be impeded by the dominant culture in the host society, the ethnic cultural beliefs and values are likely to change very slowly and persist after moving to a different social context, or resists change as a “conservative cultural response” (Phalet & Schönflug, 2001; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992; Berry, 1990; Lambert, 1987; Super & Harkness, 1986; LeVine, 1982).

Researchers have proposed from the developmental perspective to understand adolescent ethnic culture retention and ethnic identity development (e.g., Sam & Oppedal, 2004). As their interactions outside of the family increased, adolescents became aware of their ethnic differences and tried to explore their own identity (Ying, *et al.*, 2007). In their self-reflection, they had a growing consciousness of and interest in their culture of origin, and recognized the importance of identification with their ethnic culture to develop a sense of self (Phinney, 2003, 1990; Fuligni, *et al.*, 2001, 1999; Phinney, *et al.*, 1997). With their continuous and dynamic social interactions in the host society, adolescents

may view the self and their relationships differently (Kwak, 2010), and have misunderstanding, uncertainty, frustration, and conflict arising from their divergent cultural values and norms (Kwak, 2003; Barnett & Lee, 2002). Within the “boundary of cultural practice” between their culture of origin and the culture of the host society, they have to negotiate their cultural differences and overcome enduring stereotypes to develop their intercultural relationships (Su & Costigan, 2009; Sias, *et al.*, 2008; Phinney & Ong, 2002).

A rich literature has documented the effectiveness of relationships with the host in assisting international students to fit in a new culture setting (e.g., Lassegard, 2008; Geelhoed, *et al.*, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ward, *et al.*, 2001), and the negative impact of the absence of host contact on the improvement of linguistic and cultural knowledge (Hendrickson, *et al.*, 2011; Hechanova-Alampay, *et al.*, 2002; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999), however, there is sparse existing literature to address the effects of developmental and cultural factors on the cross-cultural adaptation of adolescent international students.

In an exploratory study, Kuo *et al.* (2006) examined the psychological well-being and adaptation of adolescent Taiwanese unaccompanied sojourners attending secondary schools in a large Canadian city. The research findings showed that satisfying social relationships and friendships with both co-ethnic members and members of the host culture can help adolescent international students achieve greater psychological health and resistance to acculturation stress. The researchers further observed that, in the absence of parental guidance and protection, adolescent international students were particularly vulnerable to isolation and loneliness in the host culture (Lin, 1992). They, thus, suggested that the sending parents need to be educated to understand the nature of

their children's acculturation stress, their emotional and developmental needs, and provide necessary and timely support for their sojourning children.

1.2.4 Contextual Influence

As acculturation may depend on the societal contexts in which groups and individuals have daily intercultural activities (Berry, *et al.*, 2002; Trimble, 1989), researchers have suggested that more studies needed to address macro-level factors, such as contexts of the society of origin (e.g., its cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity, its political, economic, and demographic conditions), and of the society of settlement (e.g., its historical and cultural openness, and its attitudinal situation) (Zhang *et al.*, 2011; Van de Vijver, *et al.*, 2006; Berry, *et al.*, 2002).

It is especially within the ethnic and host sociocultural contexts, that is, family, local community, and other settings dominated by both ethnic and host cultural values, beliefs, and traditions (Sam & Oppedal, 2004) that adolescents develop their culture competences through “a complex cognitive, affective, and behavioral process” (Kim, 1987).

For example, adolescents from Asian families have a strong retention of their collectivistic cultural values (Ying, 1995; Feldman & Rosenthal, 1990) that emphasize family interdependence and individuals' inseparable roles from surrounding social relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), thus compared to their American peers, adolescents from collectivist cultures may have greater closeness and deference to their parents and delayed autonomy development to follow their parents' wishes (Phinney, *et al.*, 2005). In the host culture, they may be more likely looking for support from their

ethnic social networks, such as family, relatives or friends with whom they feel more comfortable in coping with their psychological problems (e.g., Yeh & Inose, 2002; Yeh & Wang, 2000).

1.3 Deficiencies in the Studies

In the extant literature, there is consensus that in transitions most sojourners will experience some degree of stress such as homesickness and loneliness following their immersion in a new culture. This is based on the notion of cultural differences between societies and on the move from a familiar to an alien environment (Kim, 2001). As sojourners living in a foreign academic setting temporarily for their educational achievement and planning to return to their home countries eventually (Sakurako, 2000), international students not only lack personal resources (e.g., families and friends) that are available to their local peers for coping with adaptation problems (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998), but also hold cultural values, beliefs, and norms that are different from the host nationals, they may experience considerably greater difficulty than their local peers (Hechanova-Alampay, *et al.*, 2002; Berry & Kim, 1988), and face additional challenges to get adjusted to the sociocultural system of the host nation (Zimmermann, 1995).

Factors prevalent from the relevant studies that influence international students' adaptation process functioned to categorize their adaptation experiences and predicted their acculturation outcomes, but did not address their adaptation as a changing process in which students had their transforming experiences. Although this process was facilitated by a reduction in uncertainty and anxiety, it may not be linear but rather fluctuate up and down through the students' stay in the host nation (Gao & Gudykunst, 1990). In their

systematic review to examine predictors of psychosocial adjustment of international students in the United States, Zhang *et al.* suggested that more longitudinal research needed to “capture the fluctuating nature of adjustment and the changing salience of predictors over time” (Zhang, *et al.*, 2011, p.149). Ward *et al.* also suggested that the adjustment experiences might vary among and within individual students (Ward, *et al.*, 1999, 1990).

Also, these factors identified are mostly for the understanding of international students’ acculturation at the tertiary level, i.e., colleges/universities. Adolescent students at their developmental stage toward independence and autonomy (Phinney, 1992), they have traditionally received less attention (e.g., Bachner & Zeutschel, 2008) though certain aspect of their adaptation experiences may be unique (Sam & Oppedal, 2004, 2002).

Researchers have proposed to understand adolescent acculturation as an “integral” part of their development towards adaptation and gaining cultural competency in a different cultural setting (Sam & Oppedal, 2002). There are a few studies that have shown the different adolescent adjustment process from other acculturating groups (Kuo *et al.*, 2006; Umaña-Taylor, *et al.*, 2002), however, the existing literature rarely addresses the effects of developmental and cultural factors on the cross-cultural adaptation of adolescent international students (Yoon, *et al.*, 2008).

For adolescent students with intense “self-construction” toward “a coherent and integrated self” (Kwak, 2010), how they negotiated their identity challenges and tensions in a cross-cultural context, and how surrounding others in their socialization impacted on the process of their identity negotiation and transformation have not been actively

explored. For example, few studies have examined how the role of friendship helps adolescent students to learn more about the unfamiliar culture and gain more self-confidence in learning to communicate adaptively in the new culture. In particular, although there is broad support for homestay during study abroad, adolescent homestay experiences and student-host family relationships are rarely explored (Campbell, 2004).

1.4 The Purpose Statement

This ethnographic study was conducted to explore and understand the acculturation experience of a group of American adolescent students for one academic semester in the north of China. It approached adolescent acculturation as an interwoven developmental and learning process, in which they have learnt and understood cultural differences, and had the opportunity for self-discovery and cultural competency acquisition in their social interactions in typical social domains, host family, school and local community.

The concept of self holds relevance in this ethnographic study to explore how adolescent international students interpret their identities and roles as exchange students in their social interactions and make sense of their immediate situation. Also, the study probed deeper into how surrounding others impacted adolescent students' process of identity negotiation and transformation in their social interactions, and in particular examined students' homestay experiences and student-host family relationships in this longitudinal study.

Adolescent students' intercultural relationships and their self-identification were presented from the participants' perspectives at their critical transitional phase and

faithfully examine the adolescent students' engagement with situations that were meaningful in their adjustment. It gave us an insider perspective of how adolescent students' daily interactions amplified their different expectations into confusion and misunderstanding, and how they negotiated their confusions and misunderstandings, and over time their shifting behaviors ensued.

In particular, the study explored how adolescent students tended to refer to familiar cultural practices as the basis to compare and evaluate the other culture, and interpret the other's behaviors posed barriers to their intercultural understanding, and how adolescent students would enact their cultural and personal ways of sense-making and acting to cope and reconcile the cultural differences to create meaningful everyday activities.

The study may extend the existing acculturation literature on the effects of developmental and cultural factors on the cross-cultural adaptation of adolescent international students to domain-specific host culture. It may bridge the gap in the literature on the strategies in the psychological and socio-cultural adaptation of adolescent students who are rarely addressed in the acculturation literature, and make suggestions to offset the negative adjustment outcomes. It is hoped that it may contribute to shedding some light on self-resilience of adolescent students, and revealing their acculturative stresses and help-seeking behaviors so that their emotional and social needs might be better served.

The findings may give parents or program manager(s) a clear understanding of what happened in students' acculturation process, and hope that program improvement would follow suit. The findings may also be transferred to similar settings, i.e., high

school institutions in the States participating in student exchange programs, as well as to similar participants, i.e., adolescent students. It is possible to infer that such students may well face similar acculturation experiences in this study, with modifications according to differing external circumstances and personal differences.

1.5 The Research Questions

This study would convey the insider experience of the commonly documented acculturation picture and attribute to the notion that the exchange experience contributes largely to the attitudinal, behavioral, and cognitive changes in the participants. In order to understand how adolescent students have changed in their adaptation process, I proposed to conduct an ethnographic study of a group of American adolescent students to answer an overarching question:

How do the effects of developmental and cultural factors impact the cross-cultural adaptation of adolescent international students?

Specifically, the study will be addressing the sub-questions guiding my research:

- 1) What motivated adolescent students to participate in the exchange program?
Are there gaps between what students expected and what happened in their social interactions in the host cultural context?
- 2) What happened in students' daily interactions with the locals, specifically in identified social domains, i.e., host family, school and local community?
- 3) How did students' daily interactions amplify their different expectations into confusion and misunderstanding, and how did they negotiate their confusions and misunderstandings, and over time their changed behaviors ensued?

- 4) In particular, how did surrounding others, especially host family and peers influence students' process of identity negotiation and transformation in their social interactions? And how did their awareness and understanding of the cultural differences contribute to their cultural competency acquisition?
- 5) How did their changed behaviors help them achieve a better adjustment and self-development in a different cultural context?

CHAPTER 2

THE RESEARCH SETTING

2.1 Descriptions of the Research Setting

The setting chosen for this study is located at Newton, a suburban city approximately seven miles west of downtown Boston in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, which hosts the Newton-Jingshan School Exchange, one of the oldest exchanges of public secondary school students between the United States and the People's Republic of China. This exchange program was initiated in 1979, with the purpose of providing students from different cultures (i.e., American culture and Chinese culture) with opportunities to learn about and speak to one another in friendship and understanding. The actual exchange of students and teachers began in 1985, and has continued as a person-to-person homestay exchange.

This exchange program functions on an annual basis with Newton hosting students with chaperone teachers from Jingshan School in the Fall semester, and Jingshan hosting students and teachers from Newton North and South high schools in the Spring semester for approximately four-months of stay on each side. On both sides, the exchange students and teachers live with their host families, and study and work side by side with their host counterparts.

In particular, on Newton's side, students initially went through a selection process for their qualification to participate. Previous Mandarin experience is preferred but not necessarily required, and all selected applicants would prepare by participating in an intensive six-week summer institute and a continuing fall study of Chinese language as

well as culture provided by the Newton Public schools. Meanwhile, they were to be advised about survival life skills in the host culture by the program directors during their pre-departure meetings.

When they were in Beijing, the students lived with Chinese host families, and studied at the local school, the Jingshan School. At school, they attended independent classes about Chinese language, history, art, music, math, science, and martial arts, and they also sat in the regular classes to observe the interactions between their Chinese peers and teachers. Further, they had the opportunity to travel around Beijing, such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City on the weekends or during holidays. They also traveled with their Newton group and chaperone(s) to other places in China, such as Shanghai, Xi'an or Yunnan.

2.2 Rationale for Selecting the Research Site and Sampling

In 2009, through attending a workshop hosted by the International Education Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I was introduced by the host speaker to the Newton-Jingshan Exchange Program at the City of Newton where I have my residency since 2007. The ease of establishing contacts with the program director helped not only get to know a variety of program stakeholders, such as the student participants, host parents, chaperone teachers, etc., but also gain access to a wide range of program activities and events through the research process. For example, the Gala Reunion/Fundraiser on March 12, 2011 offered me a chance to trace the program back over 30 years. Also, being a resident fostered my intimacy with the Newton Community as the large research context which provided me a feasible location with reduced time and

financial expenditure to conduct interviews and participate in regular program activities (i.e., the preparatory meetings prior to China, the presentation meetings upon return from China, etc.).

The formal interviewing sample size of seven participants (indicated with identifiers⁷) in the spring semesters of 2012 and 2013 was relatively small, however, as Wolcott argued, an increase in sample size does not necessarily offer “an adequate basis for generalization”, but may “compromise” the chances to “report in depth” with thick cultural description (Wolcott, 1999, p. 88). Especially, as a feasible location within walking or driving distance, I was able to hold numerous formal interviews and informal conversations with program director(s), former student participants, chaperone teachers, and hosting parents around the Newton Community. And my continuous involvement at the research site also offered me the opportunity to be familiar with the organization at the research site (e.g., its candidate-screening committee, its intensive summer language institute, its practical program operation, etc.). Over time, this familiarity helped me to generate more complete portraits and compile detailed descriptions of the participants at the research site in the research process (Wolcott, 1994).

Further, being different from their peers who were not as interested in experiencing a new cultural environment, this culture-sharing group had in common the willingness and desire to engage in an overseas experience at a considerable emotional expense. Through observation and interview of this “relatively homogeneous group” of participants in typical social settings, its shared language and patterns of values, beliefs

⁷ Identifiers for respondents are uniform and consistent throughout text searches and coding, preferably in upper case (Lewins & Silver, 2007, pp. 22-23). For example, identifier *RJS-MS-PHI-2013* indicates first-phase interview with male student JS of 2013; identifier *RJS-MS-JE-2013* indicates journal entry with male student JS of 2013; identifier *RCC-FS-BE-2012* indicates blog entry with female student CC of 2012.

and attitudes that have developed in their social interactions at the cultural setting may be discerned (Creswell, 2007; Harris, 1968). More specifically, the comparison of the same settings at different times would help to draw on the participants' experiences as a process during which the critical factors and their effects would be easier to be identified and understood (Maxwell, 2013). Moreover, the group comparison in different exchange years also offered the opportunity for a much fuller understanding of the same patterns across the groups. Additionally, there was a reasonable variation among the participants from the social settings (Dobbert, 1982), that is, the diverse ethnic cultures in the States and their "defining impact" on participants' "make-ups" (Hofstede, 1991). In other words, the participants' different ethnic backgrounds from their familial context (e.g., the core family values, norms and styles) may lead to their individual acculturation pathway. Thus, the site and participants selected can "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125).

CHAPTER 3

RESEACH PROCEDURES

3.1 Symbolic Interactionism as Epistemological Underpinning

3.1.1 Symbols and Meanings

The “founding father” of symbolic interactionism was George Herbert Mead, a social psychologist from the Chicago sociological tradition, who was influenced by American pragmatism, in particular the views of John Dewey, who claimed that in our constantly changing social world, individuals go through a continual process of adaptation, and that our mind’s capability to contemplate a situation makes this process possible. Social interactionism was named and popularized by Mead’s student, Herbert Blumer (1969), another sociologist from the University of Chicago. It has been generally said that, while Mead’s contribution was primarily philosophical, Blumer was more concerned with symbolic interaction as a sociological theory and a research approach (Charon, 1979).

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, human society, rather than a determining structure, is perceived as a framework for social interaction (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Katovich & Maines, 2003), and in this framework, individuals “are constantly undergoing change in interaction and society is changing through interaction” (Charon, 1979, p. 23). More specifically, the society functions on the shared meanings in the form of common understandings for patterned activity and predictability in individuals’ daily interactions with the generalized others (Meltzer, 1972). These generalized others are “individuals, social groups or sub-groups, the organized community, or social class” that could influence perceptions of individuals regarding

their attitudes and behaviors. Individuals must come to understand the generalized others' intentions through the symbols and gestures the others used, and respond accordingly (Charmaz, 2014; Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011; Cardwell, 1971; Mead, 1934, p. 154). In particular, it is the "immediate social environment surrounding the particular individual", more than "the perspective of the whole society per se", that plays a vital role to the individuals' perceptions and actions (Handberg, *et al.*, 2014; Blumer, 1969).

A foundational principle within symbolic interactionism has been that human beings are distinguished from other animals by their use of symbols. As the very basis of social interaction, symbols are abstract representations of social objects, and there is no symbolization of objects outside of human social relationships (Mead, 1934). To illustrate further, human beings are distinguished from movement of physical objects or other creatures by their ability to function in a symbolic world (Lauer & Handel, 1977; Blumer, 1969). They use objects in their interactions after they develop and agree on the social meanings of these objects. These meanings are socially derived and modified through interactions rather than inherently attached to objects and situation (Charon, 1992; Lauer & Handel, 1977; Mead, 1967). The agreement on meaning that gives these social objects their designation enables verbal and nonverbal communication among humans to make sense of each other's intentions and actions (Cardwell, 1971).

As the products of social interactions, these social meanings are the most important predictors for human behaviors (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Blumer, 1969). Since meaning is founded on the way other individuals act, symbolic interactionism presumes that individuals act on the basis of a shared understanding of meaning in their environment. As people socially interact, they become aware of what the generalized

others with whom they interact are doing or willing to do. In turn, they interpret the objects in their environment and the behaviors of the generalized others, and respond based on their interpreted meaning of these objects and actions. (Tuckett, 2005; Holloway & Todres, 2003; Charon, 1992; Meltzer, 1972; Blumer, 1969, 1962). Whereas, in circumstances where the generalized others define the situation differently, conflicts may be arising until “overlapping conceptualizations” could be developed, that is, in their interpretive process to generate meanings, people form new meanings and lines of new actions to shape their future course of action (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Benzies & Allen, 2001; Blumer, 1969).

Further, Mead (1934) maintained that human beings engage in a constant process of meaning making or “mind action” which intercedes between external stimuli and human action. That said, social meanings are not inherent in the social objects or situation but are constantly changing, being defined and redefined through human interaction (Blumer, 1969). More specifically, that each object changes for the individual is not because the object changes, but because individuals change their definition of the object (Charon, 1979). Also, rather than how the situation is objectively presented to them, individuals respond to a particular situation through how they define that situation (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011). In other words, although individuals’ behavioral choices are constrained by context, history and social structures, they are not determined by them, rather, the common meaning of individuals’ action is constructed through their involvement or interaction within a social context (Charmaz, 1990). Through their “continuous dialectical process of interpretation and action”, individuals interpret the

circumstances, shift their definitions of each moment, and choose one course or “line of action” over another (Olive, 2012).

3.1.2 Self, the Generalized Others and Behaviors

As human behavior is a response to their interpretations of the world rather than to the world itself (Mead, 1934), an understanding about how humans define the situation and how they depend on an interpretive process to generate meanings can assist for a much fuller comprehension of why they behave as they do in the situation (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011). Mead (1934) proposed the notion of self and asserted that the self and the world cannot be understood in isolation, and the self needs to be appreciated as being situated in interaction with the social world. In other words, social interaction contributes to the development of a self-concept and may positively or negatively influence human well-being.

From Mead’s point of view, the self consists of the subjective I that is natural or spontaneous and therefore “uncontrolled part of the human self”, and the objective me that is “the organized set of attitudes, definitions, understandings, and expectations of others” that arises through interactions with the generalized others (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011, p. 1064). The generalized others could influence individuals’ attitudes and behaviors. In their social interactions, individuals become aware of what others are doing or about what they are willing to do; in turn, through a process of “joint action”, individuals take into account and interpret the behavior of the others with whom they interact, and create their act or behavior based on their interpretations (Blumer, 1969, p.

17; Shibutani, 1955). In other words, individuals' perceptions and actions, each affect the other, as "reciprocal" processes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 262).

As a product of social interaction, the self is also considered as "a complex interpretive process" that involves a continuous communication between the I and the me, and is developed and refined through an on-going process of participation in society (Homans, 1958; Mead, 1934). Lauer and Handel (1977) suggested that the self can be described as a process and reflexive. Self as a process means that individuals can coordinate their behaviors by decreasing the gap between their impulses (I) and expectations of others (Me); and self as reflexive means that individuals can direct their behaviors through observation, interpretation, and evaluation of the situation. Thus, rather than being fixed in one form or status, the self-concept is continually developed and constantly changing (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011).

Moreover, this self-concept provides individuals a strong motive to generate their behaviors in their symbolic world (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Blumber, 1966). In other words, being situated in the social world, individuals have the ability to interpret situations, and behave in a manner that is consistent with their self-concepts (Lauer & Handel, 1977). To illustrate further, two central concepts of symbolic interactionism need to be addressed. The first one is the concept of "looking-glass self" whereby individuals become objects to themselves by looking at themselves from the perspective of others (Cooley, 1902); the second one is the concept of "role-taking" that involves acts or behaviors resulting from the "internal dialogue" between the *I* and the *me*. Based on the inner conversation, individuals think and act in relation to others as well as toward themselves (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Mead, 1934). Their capacity to reflect upon

themselves and take the role of the others enables them to develop the sense of *social self* and initiate a particular behavior (Jeon, 2004).

Specifically, this sense of *social self* would guide and motivate individuals to generate their behaviors in their social interactions and through their interpretative process (Blumer, 1966). That is, through inner conversations, individuals reflect upon their own mental processes rather than reacting directly to a set of environmental stimuli, and engage in a constant process of meaning making or “mind action” (Charon, 2007; Jeon, 2004). Meaning becomes a core element of the phenomenon in its own right, that is, the meanings could be handled in and modified through individuals’ interpretation of the situation and the others’ action. As individuals “act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them”, they behave differently from one situation to another, and thus continually adjust their behaviors to their self-concepts (Lauer & Handel, 1977; Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

3.2 Qualitative Research as a Strategy of Inquiry

My approach to qualitative research has increasingly been informed by the philosophical stance of the interpretive social science that can be traced back to neo-Kantian German historians and sociologists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who claimed that the human sciences were fundamentally different in nature and purpose from the then dominant philosophy of positivism in the natural sciences (Neuman, 2000). In addressing what is the fundamental nature of social reality and human beings, positivism in the natural sciences aimed at explanation whereas the interpretive social science was generally characterized on the basis of understanding (Schwandt, 2000). That said, the

interpretive social science is not to “discover and document universal laws of human behavior” and thus control or predict “general patterns of human activities”, but “develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural settings” (Neuman, 2000, p. 66). More specifically, through the study of the lived everyday experience of people in specific social settings, the concern of interpretive social science is to explore and understand how people interact and get along with each other, and how their behaviors are “subjectively related in meaning to the behavior of others” (Weber, 1981).

Further, human beings are products of the society, and its structures and institutions (Hesse-Biber *et al.*, 2014, 2012). However, rather than an objective perception of social reality, our understanding of the social world is inevitably our construction out of the “evolving meaning systems or social conventions” in our social interactions with the significant others (Maxwell, 2013; Neuman, 2000, p. 72). We actively interpret the social objects and each other’s actions in our environment, possess “an internally experienced sense of reality”, and respond based on our interpreted meaning of these object and actions (Charon, 1992; Meltzer, 1972; Blumer, 1962; Shibutani, 1955). And, through an on-going process of participation in society, the notion of social self was developed and refined (Homans, 1958). In other words, our beliefs, values, or perspectives are shaped and constructed by our assumptions, subjective experiences and the reality that we are interacting with (Maxwell, 2013). Thus, individuals and society are constantly undergoing change as the definitions of each situation shift through the “continuous dialectical process of interpretation and action” (Oliver, 2012; Charon, 1992; Blumer, 1969).

Qualitative inquiry is an interpretive approach to explore and understand the meanings behind human actions, and thus make suggestions (Wolcott, 2009). A central concept of this inquiry is to acquire an “inside” understanding of a person’s definition of the situation, and ascertain what people feel, and why they feel that way, and also who else feels the way they do, where, when and how, in other words, people create and maintain their social worlds through daily interactions (Basit, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). More specifically, grounded in participants’ lived experiences, this inquiry is conducted in the natural settings where participants have their social interactions. Relying on a variety of data-collection techniques, the researcher as the instrument would describe and analyze the “primary data”, such as participants’ words and observable behaviors to understand the participants’ social worlds through interpretations of their life experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Wolcott, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This interpretive approach is associated with symbolic interactionism in the sense that social reality is based on socially constructed meaning systems through people’s social interactions, and in turn, these shared meaning systems permit people to interpret the others’ action as “socially relevant”, “with a purpose or intent”, and through interpretation of the others’ certain intentional action, people behave accordingly (Neuman, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). From the interpretivist point of view, what an action means can be grasped only within the meaning systems to which it belongs. Meanings, however, are not simply discovered, “independent of human consciousness”, but are constructed mutually in the act of interpretation that is out of the purposeful actions of interacting people within the specific social context (Charmaz, 2006; Schwandt, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Specifically, in qualitative inquiry, in order to understand the

participants' action, the inquirer must grasp "the subjective consciousness" behind that action, that is, the intention from the inside of the participants relating to their motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts and so on (Schwandt, 2000). In other words, the inquirer needs to take on the perspectives of the participants to gain an understanding of the meanings that the participants attach to their subjective experience (Blumer, 1969).

Thus, understanding is something that is produced or constructed in "a dialectic process" between the inquirer and the participants (Charmaz, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As Guba and Lincoln (2004) argued that, "the act of inquiry begins with issues and/or concerns of participants, unfolds through the dialectic process to a joint construction of a case (i.e., findings or outcomes) among inquirer and respondents in an effort toward consensus". This jointly constructed interpretation needs to take into account how the researcher and the participants' standpoints and positions affect the interpretations within the specific conditions, i.e., the particularities of the research time, space and the situation (Charmaz, 2011).

More specifically, in the act of interpretation, instead of being "passive recipients" of influences of the particular social context, participants, as "dynamic agents" would actively engage in developing their understanding of the situation and construct meanings through their interactions (Holloway & Todres, 2003, p. 352). And the inquirer would facilitate the constructions in relation to the participants as well as toward self, i.e., own standpoint, prejudgment, bias or prejudice (Schwandt, 2000). In particular, the researcher, in taking on the role of others, engages in "an all-encompassing internal dialogical process of making meaning of the data". The researcher "includes and honors" the participants' perspectives of their experiences, and also incorporates

perspectives beyond those of participants and bring in other perspectives, including her or his own reflexive understandings to construct a conceptualization that does not “attempt to reproduce” but “transcends” the participants’ stories (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012, p. 691).

3.3 Qualitative Research Design

The philosophic position of social interactionism and the interpretive stance of qualitative inquiry not only deepen my understanding of the phenomenon under study, guide what I can say about the data, and inform how I can make theoretical implication (Wolcott, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78), but they also help to “explain and justify” my research design (Maxwell, 2013, p. 43). Instead of following a linear and “one-directional sequence of steps from problem formulation to conclusions or theory”, qualitative design is argued as an exploratory, inductive, flexible, and reflexive process at each stage of the research (e.g., Maxwell, 2013, p. 2; Robson, 2011; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Especially, as an exploratory process, any component of the design such as “the activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and addressing validity threats” is usually going on “more or less simultaneously” and “each influencing all of the others” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2). Any component of the design may also need to be “reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2), and “end up addressing issues that were not imagined before the project began” (Seale, 2004, p. 313).

Rather than “method for method’s sake”, the concept of “appropriateness” in qualitative design, revolves around research questions, the “primacy of the topic or phenomenon to be studied” (Holloway & Todres, 2003, pp. 346-347). In a “participative, conversational and dialogic” relation with a group of participants, the researcher was to explore the group’s lived experiences in a specific social setting or real-life situation, i.e., how they think, believe, and behave, in other words, how they position themselves in the setting or situation, and how they relate to the significant others and perceive themselves in their social interaction (Creswell, 2007; Holloway & Todres, 2003). Through the ongoing interaction of data collection and data analysis, knowledge about this group’s learned and shared patterns of language, values, beliefs, and behaviors could therefore be claimed (Creswell, 2007; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Harris, 1968).

In particular, the qualitative findings are not simply the results of coding, categorizing and connecting data generated such as from the interview or observation in a study, but rather, they are interpreted and conceptualized from “the intellectual, philosophical, discipline-specific, and other such predilections” that individual researchers bring to their inquiry (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012, p. 1405). In other words, responding to the question *what does this mean*, the researchers stay close to the participants’ primary accounts in specific social settings where the meaningful actions occurred, and they are concerned with generating a deeper and/or fuller understanding of the meaning(s) contained behind the accounts, i.e., the participants’ words and actions (Schwandt, 2000). Further, the researcher needs to “make out what is important and what is worth paying attention to, as well as what can be known about and through the data” (Willig, 2014, p. 137). Researchers are also obliged to present their findings in ways not

only to “satisfy readers with sufficient detail about” how they obtained the data, and how they proceeded with analysis, but also to “permit readers to assess the transferability of these findings to events and persons outside the study” (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012; Wolcott, 2009).

3.3.1 Researcher as an Instrumental Tool

In the course of qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrumental tool, the primary means for gathering and interpreting data (e.g., Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In general, the researcher’s entry to the research site may face issues such as considering the appropriateness of a site, working with and obtaining permission from an Institutional Review Board (IRB), and gaining access from gatekeepers or associations to the research site (e.g., Weis & Fine, 2000). They may also need to present a management plan to conduct and report the study, convince individuals to participate in the study, build trust and credibility at the research site, address ethical issues in data collection, conduct data analysis as well as disseminate research findings (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus, instead of being detached or impersonal, the researcher is intensively involved with the participants in the course of the study, or has participated briefly but personally in the in-depth interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

3.3.1.1 Researcher’s Etic-emic role

The long-term involvement at the research site gives the researcher the opportunity to change her or his interpersonal role with the participants from an outsider to an insider (Jorgensen, 1989), or from an etic to an emic role (Patton, 2002). The

outsider or etic approach is more traditional, referring to keep an empathetically neutral stance in learning the participants' lived experience; whereas, the insider or emic approach refers to have intense interactions with the participants and have a subjective understanding of the participants and the social phenomenon under study (e.g., LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). However, this interpersonal role is not a "membership" but "an orientation", in other words, over time, the researcher would get involved in various events and activities and develop familiarity with the physical setting, thus experience on a continuum from being a stranger (unknown to the group) to go native (Creswell, 2007; Wolcott, 1999; Agar, 1986).

Further, the role as an outsider may encourage the researcher to acknowledge all dimensions of the experiences and develop diverse perspectives from data collection, and may also help the participants to be more open and less fearful to be exposed to the interview (Creswell, 2007), however, issues such as participant-researcher power imbalance and participants' resistance may lead to biased, incomplete or compromised data (Nunkoosing, 2005). The insider approach, on the other hand, may ease the tension from the imbalanced power distribution and empower the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewees by establishing an intimate and close interviewee-interviewer relationship (Weis & Fine, 2000; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). This close relationship would also facilitate the access to activities, and generate much complete and accurate information of the participants' patterns of behaviors and beliefs, thus contribute to the understanding to the "heart of the matter" (LeCompte, *et al.*, 1999; Wolcott, 1999, 1994b).

3.3.1.2 Researcher's Subjective Experiences

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that “the researcher does not approach reality as a tabula rasa. He [sic] must have a perspective that will help him see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data” (1967, p. 3, footnote 3). Similarly, Putman also argued that any view is a view from some perspective, therefore is shaped by both the social location and the theoretical lens of the observer and the observed (Mann & Kelley, 1997; Putnam, 1990). Thus, the inquirer's perspective, also called experiential data” (Strauss, 1987, p. 11) or “critical subjectivity” (Reason, 1988, p. 12), or “experiential knowledge” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 44) that is grounded in her or his “technical knowledge, research background, and personal experiences” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 45) cannot be eliminated (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), but would shape all that the inquirer did as a researcher “from the selection of topic clear through to the emphases” he or she made in writing (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104).

More specifically, in the activity of inquiring into constructions out of the evolving meaning systems that the participants generate in their social interactions, the inquirer as researcher is not “neatly disentangled” from the participants as “a disengaged, controlling, instrumental self”, but keeps an “empathic identification” with the participants by actively engaging in the life worlds of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Schwandt, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Instead of striving to get rid of or distance from her or his own subjective experiences, the inquirer regards them as “a characteristic or attribute” and engages them in the joint interpretations among inquirer and participants through their dialectic process (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Schwandt, 2000, pp. 194-195).

3.3.1.3 Researcher's Reflexivity

This, however, does not mean to “uncritically” impose the researcher’s assumptions and values on the research. The researcher needs to raise her or his own subjectivity to consciousness and use it as part of her or his inquiry process (Reason, 1988, p. 12). That is, a rigorous and systematic self-reflection on the preferences, biases, and beliefs of the researcher is suggested (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Erickson, 1986). The researcher needs to take a critical look inward, and reflect upon the ways her or his “own lived reality and experiences” impact the research process, such as how her or his personal, demographic, physical characteristics and values may influence the participants and the research site (e.g., Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 180; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

In doing so, the researcher may reflect and identify her or his own role to be taken in the study and position own standpoints (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Denzin, 1997). Take for example, what in her or his own experiences shapes the research questions and the approach to studying them (Hesse-Biber, 2014); or how he or she may influence what the participants would say, and how this would affect to drawing “the validity of the inferences” from the interviews, and using it “productively” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125); or how her or his research role may influence the interpretation of the research data and the results (Creswell, 2007). This self-reflexivity would clearly position “the researcher in the research report in relation to the issue of values and standpoint” (Murray, 2014, p. 592) and open them to risking and testing their preconceptions, biases or prejudices (Schwandt, 2000).

3.3.1.4 Researcher's Personal Interests

As Maxwell described the connections between his own experience and the theory of diversity and community,

“I also saw myself as somewhat of a ‘social chameleon’, adapting to whatever situation I was in, but this adaptation was much more an interaction adaptation than one of becoming fundamentally similar to other people.” (Maxwell, 2013, p.47)

The challenges I encountered in the social interactions of my sojourning experiences gave me the opportunity not only to develop the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the cultural differences, learn alternative ways of dealing with adaptation, but also identify cultures which I have. However, my self-identity is neither simply a presentation of the culture I came from, nor a combination of various components from diverse cultures in which I have so far experienced. On the basis of my awareness and understanding of cultural differences, it is a reflection of my life experiences, especially of the critical incidents as the turning points in my daily interactions. It is not how identical or similar I may become to others around, but the synthesized cultural values, norms and styles that are applicable in my physical, psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, and cannot be gauged simply by number, proportion or percentage. And this personal experience has impacted on my motivation (what I am going to do) and method (how I am going to do) in this qualitative inquiry.

3.3.2 Data Collection Procedures

3.3.2.1 Access and Rapport

In a Request Form for Research Access and a Research Request Letter to the Office of Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education & Special Programs in Newton, I addressed issues such as the reasons to choose the research site, the purpose of the study and the procedure for data collection, the potential risk to participants and the rights of the participants, and the accrued benefits to the participants, the gatekeeper and the research site (Creswell, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Within a couple of weeks, I gained entry to the setting and permission to study the participants in the Newton Public schools (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Since building trust and establishing close relationships may profoundly impact the conduct of the study (e.g., Marshall & Rossman, 2006), in order to “fit in” the setting and get accepted by the participants, I was carefully thinking of my own role for my initial contacts with the students. Specifically, being introduced by the program directors decreased students’ sensitivity toward me as a stranger. Also, in the first email that I sent to the students to set up for the interview, I clearly described the research purposes, the activities involved in the study, the possible plan to use the information, and the way to protect students’ rights and identity as well as a brief introduction of the researcher’s background. Further, during the first interview, I was patient with students’ responses, being respectful, and showing “an empathetic understanding” as well as a great interest to students’ perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These initial contacts helped to ease tensions, make the students feel more comfortable with me, and also contributed to the easiness in scheduling for the following interviews.

3.3.2.2 Ethical Issues

The interviews were conducted from January to May in spring of 2012 and 2013 respectively, at three time intervals including prior to the participants' departure, during their stay in Beijing, and shortly after their return to Newton. During the interviewing time, most of the participants turned 18 years of age.

I first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my university to conduct the research project and followed a strict research protocol that included informed consent procedures, confidentiality and reciprocity toward participants and the institutions related, strategies in dealing with "off the record" information, etc. Then as suggested by the program director(s), I filled in the "Request for Research Access", "Research Request Letter" and send them to the Office of Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education & Special Programs for review. About three weeks later, I received an official letter from the Office, giving me the permission to conduct my interviews. With the permission, the program director introduced me to the students and provided me with students' contact information.

Accordingly, I sent the students an Informed Consent Letter and invited them to participate in my research project. With a brief introduction of my background, this letter acknowledged the confidential nature of the interview process that the students' identity was protected, and their anonymity was assured using aliases or pseudonyms. The purpose of the study, the procedure to conduct the research, the retaining of the interviewing data, and the plan to disseminate the research findings were also explained. All the participants were made aware that their participation was on a volunteer basis and that they could withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequence

(Creswell, 2007; Sarantakos, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Lipson, 1994). With the responses from the students, I sent them the Informed Consent Form for their signature, and the Background Information sheet to be filled in. As soon as I had the students' signature, I had communication back-and-forth with each student and set up the interview at their convenient time and place.

Further, through the program director(s), I also had the opportunity to be in touch with students' parents. The parents were very supportive, and some of them were willing to drive their children for the interviews held at the Newton Free Library or my study studio. And I was also able to set up interviews with some of the parents and understand from their perspectives the impact of the exchange program on their children.

Moreover, the data that were analyzed and kept for a reasonable time period (Sieber, 1998) were destroyed to guard against sharing the personal information with individuals who were not involved in the study and who might inappropriately use it (Creswell, 2009; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). And the "off the record" information that might hurt the participants if reported was deleted.

3.3.2.3 The Pilot Study

In January of 2011, I started a pilot study in Newton to interview a group of high school students who was going to depart for Beijing, China to spend the spring semester (January-May) by participating in the Newton-Jingshan Exchange program. Also, the on-site interview time was scheduled during this pre-departure interview, and in March of 2011, with a group of school administrators from Newton, I went to Beijing for my on-site observation and interview. Simultaneously, while participating in various program

events in Newton and Beijing, I was introduced by the program director to other program stakeholders such as former participating students, chaperone teachers, and hosting parents, and had the opportunity to schedule formal interviews and informal conversations.

Semi-structured interview questions from a comprehensive literature review were applied in the pilot study. These questions were related to social-cultural and psychological factors that would impact international students' adjustment to a different cultural context, but were modified for adolescent students' unique developmental stage in which their social interactions were related to specific social contexts such as at school and with family.

In particular, I was aware and assuring that most of the questions would be addressed during the interview, which helped to refocus on the topics after the leads taken by the participants, thus kept the interview "on track" (LeCompte, *et al.*, 1999). However, at the same time, rather than imposing a preconceived structure, I also remained open to their directions by listening attentively to their stories. Questions such as "who should I talk to in order to learn more?" were raised at the end of each interview. This openness provided me an understanding of the participants' "unstated" concerns of their real lived experiences and also gain further information of the research setting. Together with the initial analysis of interviews, more enticing and focused research questions were developed and more precisely analytic categories were identified (Charmaz, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Accordingly, in the course of the pilot study, the interview guide was revised, and the interview questions were refined, extended, changed or modified, in the sense that they were developmentally

more appropriate to adolescent students' formative stage, and substantially more relevant to issues arising from the research site (Maxwell, 2013).

3.3.2.4 In-depth Interviewing

For a more accurate and complete picture of the participants, the researcher in the qualitative inquiry may collect descriptions of participants' behaviors in various forms, i.e., observations, interviewing, documents, and artifacts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Among these varieties, the in-depth interviewing typically focuses on the "lived experiences" of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2005, p. 55). In the exploration of a topic in detail, the interviewing is open to the "discretion" of the participant's response so as to "deepen the interviewer's knowledge of the topic" throughout the course of the study (LeCompte, *et al.*, 1999, p. 121). In recent years, application software, such as Skype is encouraged to use in conducting on-line interviewing. Although there are concerns raised, such as about obtaining complete Informed Consent or choosing convening time given different international time zones, these on-line tools for communication are claimed to facilitate researcher-participant interactions, and contribute to the convenience of the clarification of questions in data analysis (Creswell, 2007).

Specifically, a culture-sharing group of Newton high school students who participated in the Newton-Jingshan Exchange Program between 2011 and 2013 volunteered to be interviewed at three regular intervals over a four-month academic semester in spring each year. The interviewing for each participant was arranged at three time intervals in the spring semesters of 2012 and 2013 separately, i.e., prior to the

participants' departure for Beijing, during their stay in Beijing, and shortly after their return to Newton. Each interview took approximately one hour, for which the participants would select the time and determine the place at their convenience. Two of them were face-to-face interviews in Newton where the participants felt comfortable and where "the flow of daily events" in the setting would not be intruded, for example, Newton public schools, Newton Free library, or the researcher's study room (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). When the participants were in Beijing, on-line interview was conducted through Skype, and recorded using AMOLTO call recorder⁸ for Skype. Especially, for the on-line interview, the different international time zones between Beijing and Newton were considered⁹.

The interview settings were quiet and free from distractions which allowed me to use a digital voice recorder to adequately audiotape the accurate information. During the interview, I would also take notes. As a supplement to the audiotape data, these written notes were to record my impressions and comments during the interview so as to capture a more complete picture of the interviewing context (Creswell, 2007; Sampson, 2004; Schensul, *et al.*, 1999). In particular, an interview protocol was designed and used in the interview. It is a form with open-ended questions with spaces between questions to take notes of the participants' responses. It is also used to invite the participants to "open up and talk" at the beginning, and to thank them for their time and participation at the end (Creswell, 2007).

⁸ AMOLTO is a tool for recording Skype conversations in high quality video and audio format and with unlimited audio-recording time.

⁹ There is 12-hour time difference between Beijing and the East Coast of the States in the summer time, and Beijing is 12 hours ahead of Boston.

Further, it has been suggested to be mindful of the power and authority over the interview situation, and of the inequalities arising between the researcher and the participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 180), however, the close relationship in between may ease the tension of power distributions and empower the dialogues in the interview (Weis & Fine, 2000). Especially, by establishing an on-going and respectful relationship with the participants, the researcher would have enough time and openness for a “genuine exchange of views” with the interviewees, and purposefully explore the meanings that the participants place on the events (Heyl, 2001, p. 369).

More specifically, to be “respectful and courteous”, I have learnt to offer few opinions and advice to the participants as well as not to ask leading questions (Creswell, 2007; LeCompte, *et al.*, 1999). Thus, by relying more on the participants to describe and explain the events in specific situations, the deep meaning of participants’ experiences could be captured in their “own words” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 55). Further, while holding the previous generated categories in a flexible way rather than a tight and rigid query, I constructed more open-ended questions to minimize leading questions and to elicit participants’ responses in a conversational style, and thus, more *tell me about*, *give me an example of* and *how* questions were raised to foster more open-ended responses from the participants’ perspectives (Maxwell, 2013; Charmaz, 2011), and unearth taken-for-granted, “unstated”, or “subjugated” knowledge that would otherwise remain hidden (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

3.3.3 Data Preparation and Management

Once the data are recorded and collected at the research site, the idea of data management needs to be considered in terms of storing, retrieving, and retention for the systematic, organized, and intact data sets that would strongly influence the data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Marshall and Rossman (2006) have suggested good habits in managing qualitative data, such as labeling audiotapes, and using color coding of notes to keep track of dates, names, titles, and so on. Miles and Huberman (1994) also talked about having a physical place for data storage and retrieval. Especially, the software NVivo 11 (NVivo 11 is a software designed for qualitative methods research to organize, analyze and find insights in unstructured qualitative data) used for the data analysis in this study made more efficiently the data management.

In this study, the audio-recorded interviews (in MP3 format) was transferred to my personal computer. Then, Express Scribe (Express Scribe, a professional audio player software, offers valuable features to assist the transcription of audio recordings), was used to perform the verbatim transcription of these audio-recordings. The transcription was a time consuming process. First, a rough transcription was conducted ignoring spelling, punctuation or other fine details. Then, I listened repetitively to the interviews and revised for a fuller and more accurate transcript including fine details, such as pause, intonation, facial expression, body language and other clues that make better sense of what I heard. Later on, a native English speaker who was a graduate student from the same university helped me proof-read/check the transcription. Although the transcription was a tedious process, it was then that I began my data analysis that provided me with an initial sense of the data. Words, phrases, or sentences that were relevant to my research

question were marked and labeled, and simultaneously, research notes, logs and memos were jotted down about my impressions. By the end of the transcribing work, I have developed general ideas of the datasets through my repetitive listening to the recordings as well as reading of the transcripts.

3.3.4 Data Analysis

3.3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Instead of a static state, this world is full of social actions and life events that concurrently occur and evolve in a course of flow. Human actions are so complex in the sense that they are comprised of an interconnected and interchangeable network of concrete events and abstract concepts, that their antecedents, consequences and meanings are interpreted and constructed through social interactions and relationship formation among individuals, institutions and the society, and that “unexpected relationships” and critical transformational experiences occur in the flow of events (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Smith, 1979, p. 338). Thus, a holistic and systematic approach is needed to flesh out the events and explicate the complexities of human actions.

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analysis method and provides core skills to conduct different forms of qualitative analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). It is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), that is, through “data reduction and analysis strategy”, empirical data are “segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within a data set” (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Ayres, 2008, p. 867). More specifically, data reduction or condensation means to systematically reduce data to

“a decontextualized selection of meaning units sorted as thematic code groups across individual participants” (Malterud, 2012, p. 799). These clusters of thematic code groups are compared and contrasted, and then are organized into “more abstract categories and eventually into hierarchical taxonomies” (Smith, 1979, p. 338).

Rather than “method for method’s sake” or “the flight from method”, thematic analysis is only a means to systematically explore the study in relation to the research questions, the “primacy of the topic or phenomenon to be studied” (Nigel, 2004; Seale, 2004; Holloway & Todres, 2003, p. 346). And this analysis develops over time (Ely, *et al.*, 1997) to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). In particular, this process is not a “linear process of simply moving from one phase to the next”, but more recursive process” by constantly moving back and forth between the coded extracts and the analysis as needed (Wertz, *et al.*, 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Hence, reflecting upon commonalities and differences within and across the coding groups, the researcher would unearth the salient themes in a text at different analytic levels, link diverse experiences or ideas together to “find repeated patterns or meanings” and thus create “new readings and renderings” in this analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To explain further in more detail, code is “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). Coding is a process to organize data into meaningful groups. And regarded as “unique and indispensable” technique in qualitative analysis, coding is to assign codes to the segments of text and thus reduce them into “meaningful and manageable” textual data (Tuckett, 2005; Attride-Stirling,

2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Especially, through an “interactive” coding process, the researcher would study each segment of the data, i.e., the concrete code that illuminates the situations, such as the words and actions of the participants, and understand its “tacit meanings” behind. And interactions with these meanings “again and again” would lead to the analytic understanding of the empirical world (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 121-128).

These patterned meanings indicate a theme, “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 161). Braun and Clarke (2006) claimed that a theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). However, understandings of the theme are not simply capturing “the empirical reality”, but are constructed interpretations in an “interactive” process between the researcher(s) and the participants as well as defined by the researchers what they see as significant in the data and describe what they think is happening (Charmaz, 2014, p. 115). Thus, not only “implicit meanings and actions” from the participants’ perspectives are defined, but also the researchers’ view or subjective experiences are likely reflected in the analytic understandings (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121).

However, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argued, given “the long and complicated accounts and reminiscences” by the participants, “segmenting and coding may be an important, even an indispensable part of the research process, but it is not the whole story”, that is, participants’ interpretations and accounts of an instance or event within a specific context could be hardly discerned as an account of story but as a set of

disconnected statements or actions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 52). Then, the “flavor” of the data was gone, the writing was becoming “dry”, and the coherent flow of the “constitutive events” of participants’ experiences from interviews that integrated the whole story was missing (Seidman, 2006, p. 120). Thus, it was stated that as identification of themes and patterns progresses, connections of coded data with their original context need to be considered (Ayres, 2008). That said, the data that have been decontextualized through coding into abstract concepts and patterns retain “the relational orders” within a specific context and display in sequence, so that the actual “diversity and complexity” of relationships in the data could be “more readily” identified (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, pp. 26-28; Benaquisto, 2008).

3.3.4.2 The Inductive-deductive Approach of Thematic Analysis

The method of analysis chosen for this study was a hybrid approach of thematic analysis, incorporating connecting as well as categorizing strategies, and involving a balance of data-driven inductive approach (Boyatzis, 1998) and *a priori* theoretical approach (Creswell, 1998). An inductive or bottom-up approach is a process to identify themes that are not driven by the “researcher’s theoretical interest” or “analytic preconceptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Frith & Gleeson, 2004), but strongly linked to the data (Patton, 1990). In contrast, a theoretical or top-down analysis is driven by the researcher’s analytic interest to “include, speak to, or expand” the themes that “previous research on the topic might have identified”. It tends to provide “more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data” than “a rich description of the data overall” (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997).

Although presented as a linear, step-by-step procedure, this hybrid structure of inductive-deductive thematic analysis is “an iterative and reflexive process”, that said, it is applied flexibly to fit the research questions and data (Patton, 1990), thus, it is more “recursive” than fixed by moving back and forth through the analytic process, and developing for a more abstract level at each phase (Ely, *et al.*, 1997). It aims to grasp the physical, psychological, and cultural senses of each meaning unit in specific context within and across the groups of participants in their overall acculturation process. In particular, the close attention to coding helps me “dig into” the “tacit meanings” behind participants’ words and actions, thus understand and interpret participants’ subjective experiences within specific situations that were meaningful in their adjustment (Charmaz, 2014). Also, analytical memos and research diaries were generated to articulate my thinking and reflection on the data through the entire analytic process. These memos were revised and edited, and became the “substantive portions” of the final analytic report (Saldaña, *et al.*, 2011).

Specifically, an *a priori* template of broad codes derived from the existing literature and the pilot study was applied as “a means of organizing text for subsequent interpretation” of the subjective experiences of the participants, and these broad codes were modified and revised in the light of the analytic process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Nigel, 2004; Crabtree & Miller, 1999). It argued that *a priori* may influence and narrow findings (Tuckett, 2005; Boyatzis, 1998), however, it plays an important role in narrowing the range of possibilities for interpretation (Weston, *et al.*, 2001) and allows the researcher to be attentive to possible meanings assumed or intended by the

participants. It also enhances the “sensitivity to subtle nuances” in the data and confirms research findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, 1990).

After the thematic coding, categories and themes of participants’ experiences within and across the groups were discerned and identified. Then, line-by-line coding of the critical incidents that comprised the categorical themes were conducted to retain the “decontextualized” data to their sources, i.e., their original context (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014; Ayre, 2008). This line-by-line coding functioned as “a heuristic device” to shed my preconceptions and interact with each fragment of the coded data, and also derive the meanings of participants’ descriptions in actual social situations. These single incidents in the categorical themes were then grouped with their dimensions and properties, and rearranged “hierarchically and horizontally” to create a theoretical account of the themes (Floersch, *et al.*, 2010, p. 421) and also become connected to other categories “as a part of a larger whole” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10).

The following is the stepwise analytic structure:

- 1) Developing a coding framework

An *a priori* template of broad codes was derived from the existing literature in relation to the acculturation, learning and youth development theories. Codes in the coding framework were explicitly defined to avoid being “interchangeable or redundant” (Charmaz, 2011; Gibbs, 2007; Attride-Stirling, 2001).

- 2) Familiarizing with data

The transcription of the interviewing verbal data was checked against the digital recorder for accuracy by a native English speaker with his doctorate from the Math Department of the University of Massachusetts Amherst. My direct involvement in transcription informed the early stages of analysis for a far more thorough understanding of the data. Also, by immersing myself in the data and asking analytic questions, such as *what is in the data* and *what is interesting about them*, I became familiar with “the depth and breadth of the data” through the repeated reading of the transcription and listening to the recording (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Marshall, 1999).

3) Coding the material

The prior broad codes were assigned to the segments of text, i.e., “single words, passages, or other criteria judged necessary for a particular analysis” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 391), however, with my attention focusing on the words and concrete examples from the participants, “equally applicable” analysis was applied to “differences or contradictions” emerging from the text segments. With new codes emerging from the data, the coding frame was edited, revised and changed through the analytic process (e.g., Jain & Ogden, 1999). In the end, all the actual data extracts were collated with each code.

4) Searching for themes

I undertook to compare and categorize all the textual data coded with the same labels across the data set for a more abstract and broader level of analytic phase. Focusing on how they were related in terms of similarity and difference, codes were sorted, combined, separated, discarded or created, and accordingly grouped into clusters along with their collated text segments. The classified and abstracted text segments in the same

cluster were then compared to identify underlying categories and patterns. Identified categorical themes were further reviewed and refined by considering whether they appeared to form a “coherent pattern” to reflect the meanings of the participants’ experiences through the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5) Comparing and connecting themes

I sought to compare the categorical patterns within and across the entire data sets, and consider how themes were related to each other. Specifically, based on whether themes reflected “meanings evident in the data set as a whole”, themes were combined, refined, separated or discarded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, a line-by-line coding was conducted with the critical incidents that comprised the categorical themes. Single incidents were re-arranged with all dimensions and properties as a flow of change.

6) Summarizing themes

Identified themes were distinct and clearly linked to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). And themes were linked to each other to form a hierarchical categorical system (e.g., Smith, 1979).

3.3.4.3 The Presentation

The analytic process that comprised description, analysis and interpretation was presented as “a flow of events over time”, in other words, that a “holistic, systematic, interdependent network of events at the concrete level” was intertwined with “concepts and propositions at the abstract level” was fleshed out in the form of an analytic narrative, an argument (Smith, 1979, p. 338). More specifically, identified main themes were

structured with comparisons of differences and similarities within and across cases, among which concepts or categories from the data were woven into paragraphs, and illustrative examples from transcripts were drawn for a clear discussion. Particularly, the use of direct quotes from the raw text was to elaborate the meaning of the category, aid the specific understanding of specific interpretation and also give the participants a flavor of the original text (Nigel, 2004; Williams & Irurita, 1998).

However, the lines among description, analysis and interpretation were not clearly drawn. The focus was kept on the descriptive task until a “solid basis” was provided “for analysis and for determining where and how much to draw on the work of others” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 70). Thus, “thick” descriptions of the meaningful everyday experiences of the participants were provided to give the reader a good grasp of the perspectives of the individual participants in a particular social setting (Nigel, 2004, p. 268; Schwandt, 2000).

3.3.5 Validity

Triangulation is typically a strategy “in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and establishing valid propositions” (Mathison, 1988, p. 13). Keeping with his emphasis on the roles people play in their unfolding dramas, Goffman (1989) claimed, “I don’t give hardly any weight to what people say, but I try to triangulate what they are saying with events” (p. 131) meaning that the gap between what participants said and what happened in the real setting, i.e., the saying and the action taken need to be checked with “evidence” (Maxwell, 2013; Goffman, 1989). In the in-depth interviews, participants were asked to support their statement with specific

examples. Also, in this “single-setting” interview study, the comparison of the same settings at different times helped to draw on the participants’ experiences as a process, and identify the critical events and their effects on participants’ adjustment (Maxwell, 2013).

It is also suggested that collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings may reduce the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method” and allow “a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops” (Maxwell, 2013). In this longitudinal study, data were collected from “multiple and different sources”, i.e., in-depth interviewing, on-site visiting and observation, and documenting such as participants’ on-line blogs and journal entries were used to present “the native view of reality” and check data accuracy (Creswell, 2009, 2007). And, while collecting data from various sources, talking and checking with other stakeholders such as chaperone teachers, host parents, program directors and former exchange students provided for a better understanding of relevance regarding the research setting and its participants.

Further, rather than jumping into the final conclusions, the description, analysis and interpretation were presented as a coherent and interconnected process, that is, the focus of the descriptive part was to provide “a solid basis for analysis and for determining where and how much to draw on the work of others” for “interpretive remarks” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 70). In particular, through the “thick cultural descriptions” of the events, conversations and behaviors, the reality of the cultural groups in a research setting was coherently presented that may be transferable to other settings (Wolcott, 1999; Clifford, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Moreover, my subjective experiences and knowledge of acculturation from relevant rich and diverse literature helped to identify what it was that the participants under study experienced in the host culture that was distinctive from daily activities, for example, eating, taking subway or wearing heavy coat in winter. As well, my familiarity with the research setting not only decreased my strangeness to the participants, but also increased participants' eagerness to share their experiences and perspectives that could not be understood by their parents and peers in the States.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 The Social Context

4.1.1 The Metropolitan City, the Host Family and the Daily School Routines

The fact that “China has been historically isolated from the rest of the world” is changing. China has been “slowly opening up” to the outside world since the 1980s, and there is, especially in big cities, “a huge westernization and modernization sweeping through”. Beijing, the capital of China, is a city with a combination of the old and the new, where you may walk around the “maze-like” ancient Hutongs¹⁰, seeing the culture and fearing getting lost, or you may take the pretty “straightforward” subway system across the whole city and go down the streets with “high-rise” apartments, feeling like “walking in New York”,

“When I, when we first came to Beijing, I think I was, I was, something shocked me, maybe like how many buildings...how many cars were in Beijing”, recalled by one exchange student. (AM, 1st interview)

In Beijing, you could see foreigners “everywhere” and “every day”, and as one student said, “if there any more [foreigners], I can almost forget that I am in China”. (CF, 1st interview)

However, on the other hand, this modernization also creates various social issues, such as the pollution to which the too many cars in Beijing are “the huge contributor”.

¹⁰ Hutongs (pinyin: hùtòng) are a type of narrow streets or alleys, commonly associated with northern Chinese cities, most prominently Beijing. Following the founding of the [People’s Republic of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People's_Republic_of_China) in 1949, many of the old hutongs of Beijing disappeared, replaced by wide boulevards and high rises. However, many of Beijing’s ancient hutongs still stand, and a number of them have been designated protected areas. The older neighborhoods survive today, offering a glimpse of life in the capital city as it has been for generations. (Cited from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hutong>)

The pollution is “more like a daily thing”, and “there's always some haze out” although “it differs”,

“Starting off at least from a pollution standpoint”, one student recalled the first day when he flew in Beijing, “It was right on the tail end of...the worst string of pollution...and you could barely see out the plane window.” (MM, 1st interview)

And the “driving culture” in Beijing is “crazy”,

“...it seems like there's just...abandonment for rules of the road and you just drive to get ahead...you drive 'cause you know at any point someone could just swerve into your lane.” (MM, 1st interview)

In this metropolitan city, the adolescent exchange students have been going through their acculturation process in their daily interactions, in particular, at the host school and with the host family.

School is the context where the exchange students spent most of their time. Within the school, they followed the daily school routines. They wore school uniform as being part of the school. They took classes to observe the Chinese teacher-student interactions in class and generate their understanding of the Chinese teaching and learning methods. They would get together with their Newton group in the longer lunch time and talk about various issues at school; they would organize English Corner and have interactions with Chinese students; they would participate at the school club and have a better understanding of the Gaokao¹¹; they would play basketball and make Chinese friends; and they would present at the school Cultural Festival and act out their own way of understanding of Chinese Culture.

¹¹ Gaokao (Chinese: 高考): It refers to the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (also translated as National Matriculation Examination, often abbreviated as NCEE, short for National College Entrance Examination), commonly known as Gaokao. It is an academic examination held annually in People's Republic of China. This examination is a prerequisite for entrance into almost all higher education institutions at the undergraduate level. It is usually taken by students in their last year of senior high school, although there has been no age restriction since 2001.

The host family is another context where the participants live and interact with their host parents and sibling(s). This host family always includes two generations as parent(s) and kid(s) as the nuclear family against the once four-generation-under-one-roof linear Chinese family structure, which may mainly be attributed to the Westernization, and the two decades of one-child policy that may cause the Chinese aging society, and also influence the Chinese parenting style.

In this nuclear family, some of the host parents are “generally pretty modern, up-to-date on all the technology”, and “caught-up on times”, and the parents-kid(s) relationship is becoming more relaxed and friendly compared to the autocratic and distant relationship that has been predominant in Chinese society for ages. However, compared to the less strict and lenient Western parenting style, Chinese parents are “much more involved in their children’s business”, and have earned themselves the nickname “helicopters” referring to their propensity to hover over their children.

Tracing back to Confucianism, Chinese culture is deeply ingrained in education which leads to virtue and social status. The ancient Chinese educator and philosopher Tsze-hsiâ once said, “Virtue is such a course, learning extensively, and having a firm and sincere aim; inquiring with earnestness, and reflecting with self-application” (Chapter 6, Confucian Analects¹²). And he suggested, “the student, having completed his learning, should apply himself to be an officer” (Chapter 7, Confucian Analects). To some degree, this suggestion is in accordance with an old folk saying that implicates the materialistic

¹² Confucian Analects (Chinese: 论语, pinyin: *Lún Yǔ*; literally: "Edited Conversations"): also known as the *Analects of Confucius*, is a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and his contemporaries, traditionally believed to have been written by Confucius' followers during the Warring States period (475 BC–221 BC). (Cited from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analects>)

purpose of learning in China, “as long as one studies hard, then wealth, high-paying jobs, and beautiful women will all come his way”.

Chinese culture is considered as a face culture, in which people’s sense of worth is highly affected by how much respect they get from others (Woo & Prud’homme, 1999). The more social expectation people fulfilled, the more respect they may obtain. One such expectation is making sure their children are well-developed, especially in terms of academic achievement that would bring honors to the family, in Chinese as Guangzongyaozu. Chinese parents have great child-based worth and some parents even tied their feelings of self-worth to their children’s academic performance which is ultimately determined by the National College Entrance Examination, the Gaokao in China.

As “the home base system”, and as “the buffer zone” between the participants and the outside world, the host family is an important context where the participants had a sense of homestay. However, it is also a context where the participants encountered the helicopter parenting style, i.e., being strict, being controlling, and being overly protective, and had their most confusing or disagreeable moments.

4.1.2 Acculturation as Adaptation, Learning and Development Processes

In this study, study abroad can be seen to provide a social platform on which adolescent exchange students experienced acculturative stress and learnt to adapt to the different cultural context, and from which they had their “first-hand” learning experiences and psycho-social adjustment. Being “unique” and different from other international student groups at the tertiary level, i.e., colleges/universities, adolescent

students' acculturation is an integral part of their development. In the acculturation process, their adaptation and development are interwoven through their learning process as they interact within specific social contexts, at school and with host family in particular.

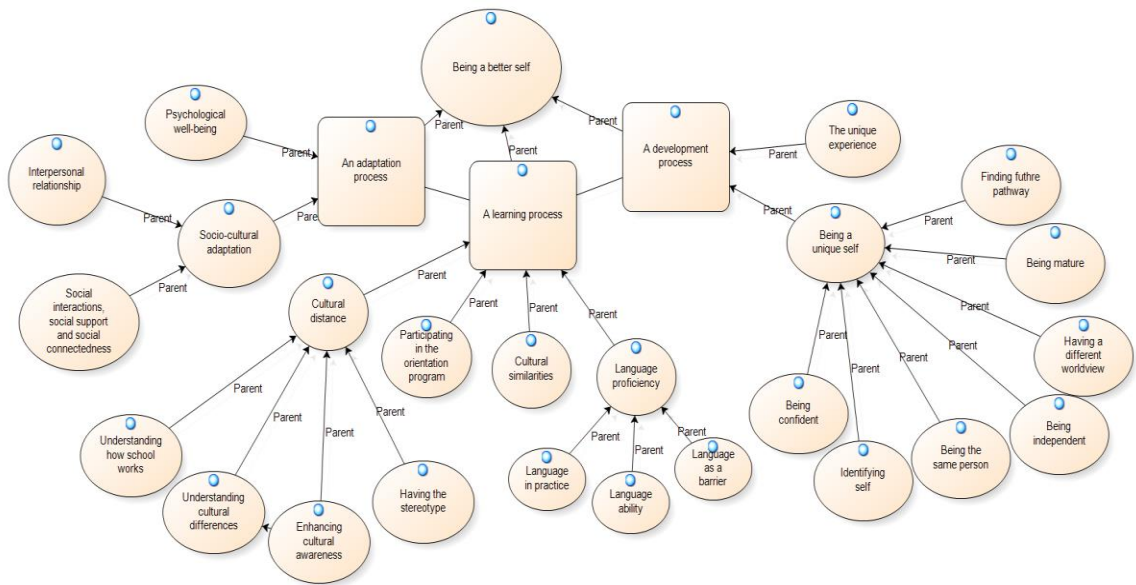


Figure 1: The interactive framework

4.2 Some Psychological Factors

4.2.1 Seeing the World First Hand

There were various reasons that motivated these American students to participate in this Newton-Jingshan Exchange program, looking to the heritage for those who have an Asian background, or being influenced by significant others, such as previous exchange students, family member, or language teacher. One student talked about how his Chinese teacher influenced his participation,

“But all of a sudden, I think Chinese like things make sense to me, especially characters and ideology or something. And also my teacher Mr. Zhu, he was just

amazing...he is like a really nice person. He is like a fun person to be around. And that's ultimately why I decided on going on the exchange.” (TM, 1st interview)

There were also other reasons, to “be immersed in a different culture”, to “learn the language”, and to “really know Chinese culture”, especially about “how school works” and “what Chinese peers are doing”,

“So when I heard about the exchange program, I thought it was a really good opportunity to spend some time like surrounded by the Chinese culture...I can spend time learning about like another culture and how school works in a different country. I thought that was really cool. I really wanted to be able to take part”, one student said. (AM, 1st interview)

“Cause as an American teenager, of course I've been like opened up to American culture from this side, but I don't know what Chinese teenagers are doing”, said another student. (LF, 1st interview)

“And I knew that the only real way to learn more Chinese, especially to work on the things that I was worst, which is the listening comprehension is to go and immerse yourself in the language”, another student was explaining to go beyond his Chinese classes to further his language studies in China. (JM, 1st interview)

In general, they expected to immerse themselves in a different culture, living with their host family, taking part in Chinese school life, interacting with Chinese teenagers at their age, and looking for the language aspect and furthering their Chinese studies beyond the classrooms.

These motivations are related to the distinct features of the participants' developmental stage, their curiosity to go beyond the familial context and see the world through their own eyes. Their curiosity was from wanting to know of their ethnic identity, and from wanting to know another culture at first-hand,

“It is like I have spent like my life learning about China and culture. It is like mostly from second-hand sources, I don't really have opportunities to go and see the country myself like especially interact with kids like my age. So this is the perfect opportunity for that,” said one student with Chinese background. (PF, 1st interview)

“I was motivated a few years ago. I became very interested in Chinese culture and I like really wanted to experience it first-hand...And I also think it is a good opportunity to maybe take part in Chinese school life because I have lived my entire life in America and I've never left the country before,” this student went further to talk about his curiosity about school in China,

“As I’ve always experienced the school in the U.S., I have heard things about education in China, how strict, and how difficult it was. And I wanted to see first-hand if this is really true.” (AM, 1st interview)

Their curiosity was also from their wanting to have unique experiences that would be “different”,

“I’d done the three or four week trips to central Europe, I’d done small vacations, but I’d never really -- I never really experienced something like this, and I think that the reason I went on this trip was to truly give myself an experience that was different than I think I had ever had before.” (MM, 1st interview)

This unique experience might also be “a life changing experience” in which the participants may need to put themselves into a challenging situation, a different cultural context, and “push through” to “become stronger”,

“I know...that is the best way for me to do a lot of things just to put myself into a very difficult situation and you know, like sink or swim. I thought that was fun, like doggy paddle.” (TM, 2nd interview)

4.2.2 Having Assumptions of Our Chinese Peers

Prior to their departure, the participants had stereotypes of the Chinese people, especially of their Chinese peers who were “incredibly diligent” and “studied hard all the time”,

“I assumed that students in China were almost like Robots and they did nothing but study. And if they had fun, it was very rarely”, said one student. (AM, 1st interview)

And they had strict parents who were “overly micromanaging” their children’s life and “overly obsessed” with academic achievement,

“I think I sort of played up the tiger mom in my head.” (MM, 1st interview)

And also, they talked about the Chinese students being less mature. Being less mature means that they were “a little spoiled” by their “over-protective” parents, and “less independent”. Being less mature also means that Chinese students were “socially a little bit younger than what to be expected in America”. They were not actively initiating conversation, in particular,

“...the guys are being more reluctant to talk or socialize...may be a problem to make friends with them.” (PF, 1st interview)

4.2.3 Expecting Differences

Generally, they expected to immerse themselves in a different culture, living with their host family, taking part in Chinese school life, interacting with Chinese teenagers at their age, and looking for the language aspect and furthering their Chinese studies beyond the classrooms,

“Of course, I was expecting difference. I mean the U.S. and China are two different countries.” (AM, 1st interview)

They usually had the expectation for the differences, such as the “crazy” driving culture, the daily city pollution, the different Chinese food, especially, the host family that would have different customs and rules,

“Expectation. I did have a few because when I was over the course of the summer program, we were told what might happen with my host family, maybe how they would treat us, and how they have expectations of us.” (AM, 1st interview)

They expected that their host parents would be “nice” to their guests,

“Because that's also what I read Geography of thought, where it has been Chinese culture to be extremely gracious, extremely giving to their guests.” (AM, 1st interview)

This expectation was coupled with worries,

“And just because I feel like they're going to, they probably would get irritated later on because it's annoying to have an extra person in your household at times.” (PF, 1st interview)

They were worried because they might be “a hindrance more than a help”, or “a burden on the family” if not “blend in” the family customs or rules. And, they expected that their host family would know “there'd be something we disagree because our cultures are very different”, and that they would “tell me if I do something wrong”,

“And culturalized customs, I feel like they would kind of just lay down the rules or something. I might specifically ask them to do that, just so I don't like to do anything offend anybody or anything.” (PF, 1st interview)

4.2.4 Having more Similarities than Expected

Staying in China, the participants found that there were “more similarities than expected”, that the “incredibly diligent” Chinese peers also had “the same amount of flick-outs”, the “outside work”; that instead of being “incredibly studious”, the Chinese students were “relaxed” and “speaking freely” in the school club; and that their host parents were not “overly micromanaging”,

“So I think, while -- while she's very -- um -- she's very connected with her -- her daughter's studies, she's not -- um -- overly, overly, overly micromanaging and -- uh -- making sure herself that she does so. So it's -- it's not a true tiger mother like I thought it would be.” (MM, 1st interview)

Admittedly, these expectation gaps moderated the participants’ extreme stereotypes of Chinese culture, especially their Chinese peers and host parents,

“A lot of books try to paint a picture of black and white, how the two cultures are the opposite of each other; they're very different; like oil and water, they don't mix. But while I'm here... you also notice similarities that aren't really painted in the books that -- that, uh -- exist between all cultures”, as one student was commenting on the books he read in the pre-orientation program. (JM, 2nd interview)

However, individuals are imprinted with their own ethnic cultural identity and accordingly, would think and act differently,

“I mean as much as you prepare for something, nothing can really prepare you for the real deal. I learned about Chinese culture, I read books about Chinese culture, but there's nothing that can really give me the same experience as living in BJ.” (JM, 2nd interview)

The differences in the “real deal”, by living and having social interactions with the locals in a different culture, need to “be aware of”. It was through the interactions that arose the misunderstanding and confusion,

“Other stuff that I read about, I know about but I didn't really, I didn't expect as much as I should have, so like the misunderstanding that occurred were something I knew about but I wasn't really expect it to be as much as I should have. And so first it confused me.” (JM, 2nd interview)

4.2.5 Having Culture Shock

Though they expected the differences in China, the participants were so *uncertain* that they felt “almost a little bit in the dark”,

“Because despite I have learned so much about China beforehand and being told so much what to prepare for...I was afraid initially before I landed in China because I wasn't sure how what I knew would be enough.” (JM, 2nd interview)

They were worried and afraid that whether or not they could “survive” in China with only the knowledge they had, and they were anxious about what more to expect,

“There are always a few things that are missing that I didn't read about it, I didn't hear about or look, or see or learn, so those arose themselves as culture shock.” (JM, 2nd interview)

Shortly after they arrived in Beijing, they were “shocked” by such a different city life,

“When I, when we first came to BJ, I think I was, I was, something shocked me, maybe like how many buildings were, actually something that caused me a great shock is how people drive in BJ”, said one student who was “terrified” and “scared” though he “eventually got it over”. (AM, 1st interview)

“Starting off at least from a pollution standpoint, I remember... immediately I was really struck by it [the pollution] and I thought, ‘Wow. It's even worse than I expected.’ But then I woke up the next day and there was a blue sky. And I realized that so hard. The pollution here is more like a daily thing.” (MM, 1st interview)

And they were “overwhelmed” to meet their host family,

“It was odd, because all of a sudden, I was with these people that I didn't know really, but I just kind of had to trust.” (TM, 2nd interview)

This suddenness was “hard to grasp”, and made them just “kind of taking everything at stride”. In particular, during the first few weeks, that staying connected with America helped them not “be homesick”, feel “too bad”, or have “significant” problems,

“Obviously my parents were really supportive of me during this... And I think that -- um -- I think that it would be much harder for me to do this if technology wasn't what it was like today and I could keep in constant -- constant contact with them.”

Then he talked about his group's first around-China trip shortly after he landed, and how hard it was not being able to get connected with his parents in the States,

“Since we were on the trip we were basically going from hotel to hotel, and I expected -- I was expecting the hotels to have internet access or WiFi, but they didn't,” he continued, “So I was cut off from America”. (JM, 1st interview)

4.3 A Home Base Away from Home

4.3.1 Living with Our Host Family

4.3.1.1 Having Uncertainty, Anxiety and Worry

Before their departure to China, the participants were told what might happen with their host family, such as how the host family would treat them, and how the host family may have expectations of the participant, and were told so much what to prepare for,

“I feel like they might expect me to adjust to the customs. I really hope they do tell me if I do something wrong. Then I'm just going to change as much as I can.” (TM,

1st interview)

“I’ve learned to just, sort of, at this point, go with the flow, let them do what they want over my -- over what I want.” (MM, 1st interview)

They were uncertain, anxious or got “pretty stressed out” to meet their host parents,

“I have no idea what is going to happen. I was worried. I was unsure. I think I was anxious maybe because I was not sure what to expect.” (AM, 1st interview)

Specifically, regarding the family rule, the participants were worried,

“I feel like they [the host family] would kind of just lay down the rules or something...I feel like they're going to, they probably would get irritated later on because it's annoying to have an extra person in your household at times.” (PF, 1st interview)

“It's weird. Like, they've been living their whole life and then I'm just gonna like dropping in. So they're used to doing what -- what they do all the time, and -- um, you know -- it's -- um -- it's -- it's a burden on the family if you can't like sort of blend in.” (CF, 1st interview)

4.3.1.2 Meeting Our Host Family

However, as soon as the participants got off the airplane and met their host family at the airport, they felt “more relaxed”, and “much easier” about their stay in their host family,

“The second I saw them, they were smiling and they started talking to me.” (TM, 1st interview)

“I was afraid initially before I landed in China because I wasn't sure how my -- how what I knew would be enough. But then when I came here, I actually was putting into the situation that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be...I think it's just natural. The worrying's worse than the action itself.” (JM, 1st interview)

4.3.1.3 Talking at the Dinner Table

The interactions with their host family allowed them to practice their Chinese and “partake in real Chinese activities”, such as going out and playing badminton every week,

or spending “a fair amount of time” watching TV and trying to understand “what was going on”.

A lot of the family interactions in particular occurred at the dinner table where the participants will sit down and eat together with their host family. This was a place for the participants to talk about daily issues and practice their Chinese with their host family. The topics may vary, usually about the participants’ experiences at school, general things that they have done, or their ideas on different issues. The participants also told their host family about life and education in America.

This dinner table presented a place to try out their language,

“There is definitely a lot of discussion that goes on... So while we were eating, my host family, they will talk to each other, occasionally they will ask me questions. But for the most time, I am sitting there. I am trying to understand like the conversation that's going on between them. But every now and then, I become part of the conversation.” (AM, 1st interview)

4.3.1.4 Pairing with My Host Sibling

The participants had their host sister or brother who was usually two or three years younger than them from Jingshan School. They may stay in the same class with their host sibling at school, and hang out together in their spare time,

“In the beginning, I always went to somewhere like with my host brother. He is always there with me. But at the end, like I am more comfortable, maybe alone. And also my host brother was just getting lazier and lazier, he didn't want to like baby-sit me, and I don't want him to baby-sit me, so eventually I did get to do more stuff like alone,” one student was joking how his host brother was baby-sitting him. (TM, 2nd interview)

Their host sibling usually spoke “very good English”, and helped the participants to communicate with their host parents, “If my host parents will say something that I don't understand”, or “If they [host parents] don't know how to say a word and I don't know in Chinese”, their host sibling would help them for translation,

“And my host brother is not around to translate it. It's been a little challenging to try to get my point across and to hear what they are saying.” (JM, 1st interview)

The participants usually had a good relationship with their host sibling. They learnt some social issues from their host sibling, or made their Chinese peer friends through their host sibling, or learned Chinese words with their host sibling. They might also share common interests, and do activities together,

“For example, he and I both like soccer. We both like golf. And we both like running. So we can do a lot of activities together for sports. When at the house, we were not doing anything, or with the entire of my host family, my parents, we play board games, and sit and talk like a family.” (JM, 2nd interview)

4.3.2 Having Confusing Moments

Also, the host family was a place where the participants had the most confusing, disagreeable and misunderstanding moments in their daily activities such as eating, buying things, wearing clothes, and taking the subway, and where they negotiated their self-identity, and learned to “go with the flow” and be understood.

4.3.2.1 Losing a Sense of Independence

Their American parents always encouraged the participants to be independent,

“My personality, I don't like to be supported that much because my parents had me to do a lot my own.” (JM, 1st interview)

“...my mom really wants me to do what I want to do. She doesn't necessarily worry about it. And she believes that I know what I want to do with my life.” (TM, 2nd interview)

“It is a bit weird when they [the host parents] forced to pay for me.”

Compared to their American parents who encourage them to earn their own money to buy things, the participants talked about how their host parents were paying for things that they were buying,

“Whenever I tried to pay for something, like for example, my cell phone bill, I attempted to pay for that, they won't let me... I try to be independent, and I found it kind of weird when my host mother, like paying for things that I was buying... It hasn't been terribly expensive so far but I thought it is a bit weird when they forced to pay it for me... I am still trying to pay for things but I can't.” (AM, 1st interview)

“They [the host parents] offered to drive me everywhere.”

They also talked about when “there were times” they would want to go somewhere or take the T, which is “obviously easy” in America, however, in China with their host family,

“...this is terrifying and you're [the participant] not going to do it”, one student said. (TM, 2nd interview)

“That was something -- Just drive him. Just drive him. He'll get lost. He doesn't know Beijing. He'll get lost, and then we're gonna be -- We're gonna have to go find him.” (MM, 1st interview)

Another participant also said that his host father initially would “offer” to drive him “everywhere”, and tried to “prevent” him from taking the subway,

“Well. I appreciate it. They are trying to make things convenient for me, but I think that at some cases, it would be easier for both of us if I pick up the subway.” (AM, 2nd interview)

They felt they were losing a sense of independence,

“So it -- it was really tough to -- um -- get them to realize that I understand maps, and that I understand where my house is on this map, I understand how to get back. But that was something that it really took a while to -- uh -- get a sense of independence.” (MM, 1st interview)

4.3.2.2 Having less Freedom and more Restriction

In the States, the parents gave the participants “a lot of freedom”, and allowed them to make their decisions,

“I think they're [American parents] pretty relaxed, pretty loose. They give me a lot of freedom because they trust me like to make my own decisions.” (CF, 2nd interview)

“At home, my parents are almost the opposite the helicopter, the helicopter parents. Since I was very young, they gave me a lot of freedom to figure out who I am and what I like by myself.” (JM, 1st interview)

The parents may offer their advice along the way but encourage the participants to “learn from the consequences”,

“They give me the advice along the way but ultimately they allow me to make my own decisions and learn from that.” (JM, 2nd interview)

“They stand back, they let me make my own decisions, but they also offer their advice when they think that I could be doing something better. I respect that.” (MM, 1st interview)

“I cannot eat anymore.”

That “the food like what you eat and when you eat is more important” in China than in America, however, this was probably the issue that the participants had most of their confusing time with their host parents,

“I said I like spicy food. We had spicy food almost every single day after that...although it was truthful when I say spicy food”, a student talked about a “mistake” that he made the first day with his host family. (AM, 1st interview)

Their host parents were always worried that the participants might be “too cold” or “uncomfortable”, or “not eat enough”,

“...there is probably the thing we argue the most about is how much I eat and so they constantly said, you are not eating enough, you are not eating enough. And I am saying, I am full, I am full, I cannot eat any more.” (JM, 1st interview)

“They [the host parents] would, even at the end of the meal, they would keep offering me food even though I was full and everyone else was done eating”, another student also talked about the feeding culture at his host family. (AM, 1st interview)

“I am not being able to choose what to wear.”

However, the participants stated that their host parents controlled them a lot more than their parents in the States, and that they had less freedom to “go off shore” by themselves, like going shopping or doing their own chores,

“Another thing is to go shopping. So if I needed some -- if I needed shampoo, if I wanted to buy some food, they don't allow me to go shopping by myself.” (JM, 1st interview)

“I am used to being able to choose my own clothes and I know the temperature outside, I know how I feel like in that temperature...but here, in the winter, even though I personally will be fine with T-shirts and shorts, they [the host parents] would force me to wear three layers before I go out.” (JM, 1st interview)

“They [the host parents] read to the subtext.”

In China, their host family “read to the subtext” that was going beyond what the participants were saying,

“So, like, go shopping. Oh, no. I'm -- I'm really tired. I shouldn't go. But then that would mean, oh, you're sick. Go sleep for the day, or something like that.” (MM, 2nd interview)

And their host family would look how the way the participants reacted to build up the assumptions about the participant that “were not necessarily true”,

“So if I didn't eat something 'cause I wasn't hungry, they think I didn't like it... I think it took a couple of weeks, or a week or two of me telling them that when I say I meant. So if I am not hungry, meaning I am not hungry. It doesn't mean I don't like the food.” (JM, 2nd interview)

Knowing that a lot of “stuff” that they could be allowed to do in the States was not allowed to do in China, and knowing that how their action was “thought of” by their host family, the participants “definitely watched more carefully” in China. However, it

was through the confusion and misunderstanding that the participants' learning journey in the "real deal" started.

4.3.3 The Chinese and Their Characteristics

4.3.3.1 Collectivism

In the book, *The Geography of Thought*, the writer notes that, especially in Eastern cultures, people have very collective thoughts, used a phrase as "the peg that stands out is pounded down" to illustrate how in general, East Asians are likely to be less concerned with personal goals, and "individual distinctiveness", but more with group goals, "coordinated action" and "harmonious social relations" (Nisbett, 2003, pp. 48-49).

Although the differences are "not to the extent like oil and water", and they do "mix" with the Westernization in modern Chinese society, the participants agreed that there were "noticeable" differences between the collectivism of Eastern culture and the individualism of Western culture,

"Individual decisions are very rare here. It's -- It's -- uh -- It's typical that for one person to make a decision, they would ask the advice of an entire group, like the family or a group of friends or a boss or something like that. It's not -- A decision isn't necessarily made by just one person here. It's always -- It's passed around for advice." (MM, 2nd interview)

They found this concept of collectivism to "be kind of true" in many social contexts, such as in the school, and in the host family.

"I found out...in the school environment where everyone is, like during morning exercise, everyone is lined up doing the same thing. Or during maybe raising, the flag raising ceremony that is on Monday morning, things like that." (AM, 2nd interview)

"I mean, maybe it's just 'cause I'm in a host family...but it seems like here everything's a lot more family oriented, a lot more group oriented than a single person. Everything is—um--together rather than a single piece." (MM, 2nd interview)

This concept of “being together rather than a single piece” was also talked by other participants,

“Everyone in this country is like me, we are all groups, or family, none of us is different... you imagine yourself all like one organism”, said one student. (TM, 2nd interview)

And “everyone [in China] is supposed to maybe be alike and work together, be part of the society, instead of working or acting as individuals”, said another student. (AM, 2nd interview)

4.3.3.2 Hospitality

The hospitality of Chinese impressed the participants,

“They’re really hospitable, maybe more so than Americans...they don't have those little -- um -- etiquette things like holding the door for somebody, but if they let you into their house, or their home, they're really welcoming”, one student said. (CF, 2nd interview)

“They would be very -- uh -- gracious to who they were hosting ’cause I knew that was the Chinese way, --where you do anything for the guest. And I think both turned out somewhat true. I think that they're definitely very gracious. They're definitely very welcoming. They do a lot for me”, said by another student. (MM, 2nd interview)

The word hospitality is always related to the food culture as a way for social communication and interaction,

“China is a very food-related culture, lot of stuff...like communication and how people interact are centered around food.” (JM, 1st interview)

“Like a lot of the family interactions that go on occurred at the dinner table or in a restaurant. If I want to meet with my extended family, my grandparents, my uncles, my aunts, we go out to dinner and talk.” (JM, 2nd interview)

In particular, it is “a very traditional way in welcoming guests”,

“The first day I got here, my parents, my host family, they took me out to dinner, to kind of welcome me. And all of my host family’s, my host siblings' grandparents were there and a bunch of other people.” (AM, 1st interview)

“At New Year, my host family took me out to dinner three or four nights in a row, meeting extended family member after extended family member. I -- I really had a good time.” (MM, 2nd interview)

Treating their guests with abundant and delicious food is a way for Chinese to show their hospitality to and respect for their guests, as well as provide their guests the host’s generosity and graciousness.

By reflecting back to his most *confusing* moment at his host family that his host parents were “constantly” saying that the participant was “not eating enough”, the student said,

“So I think that the food is an important part of Chinese culture and that the Chinese people here in BJ are really proud of their foods and my host family wants me to eat as much as possible and try as much as possible.” (JM, 2nd interview)

4.3.3.3 Indirectness

The concept of indirectness was discussed many times by the participants,

“Chinese people are less open with saying what they really feel...they have to keep under wraps.” (LF, 1st interview)

“No one will ever tell me directly I'm doing something wrong. No one will ever directly tell me, when I'm going somewhere, where I'm going.” (AM, 1st interview)

As a matter of fact, Chinese culture is very indirect, for example, with the indirectness, when Chinese people express their disagreements or reject a request, they avoid saying NO. This cultural trait of indirectness is somehow linked to the concept of face because they do not want to embarrass others, especially with the presence of other people. Thus, with the indirectness, Chinese people “are a lot more likely to read the subtext” or “read the subtext more than” those in the West.

In the West, direct comments do not usually have any other special meanings except for what is directly said; sometimes they do, but not in comparison to Asia. For example, in the West, that “I don’t like the food” means “I don’t like the food”, but in China, it could mean, “I don’t like the cook, I don’t like the people who I’m with, or I don’t like the place that I’m at”, etc.

This trait of indirectness causes ambiguity when facing the directness in the West,

“So a lot -- A lot -- Just a lot of the confusion was based on what I wanted to do versus what they thought I wanted to do.” (MM, 2nd interview)

“They [the host family] had assumptions of how I acted that was not necessarily true because I wasn’t totally aware how the way I acted was being thought of, how my actions will make them think...And so that was really the misunderstanding that occurred between my host family and I, or me.” (JM, 2nd interview)

The participants had gradually learnt that the Chinese culture is “not a very direct culture”, and that going beyond what the participants were simply saying or trying to get across, their host parents looked “a little deeper” into how the participants would “act” and “react to certain things” and gain or “build up” assumptions about them.

4.3.4 Helicopter Parenting

4.3.4.1 Being Strict

In the U.S., the participants’ parents “believed” that they would study on their own and “a lot of the academic pressure was put on” by the participants themselves,

“I like studying most of the time. And I like to do it well”, one student said, “Probably ’cause, I know that I can do better, so I need the discipline to push through.” (CF, 2nd interview)

However, in China, it is “mainly the parents” who motivate the students. The parents are “much involved” in their children’s “business” and very focused on the academic achievement of their children,

“The host mom in China, she was like very much in her daughter's business, like even though she knew her kid is a good student, she is always making her do her homework, and talk to her like go to do your homework, make sure that she is like studying.” (AM, 1st interview)

“I think I sort of played up the tiger mom in my head. I mean, even in my host family, so they'll – they'll inquire into every test or every class. ‘Oh, you have a test tomorrow. You should study’... they're much involved in what their child is doing.” (MM, 1st interview)

“Well, like her parents...they put more restrictions on it, like how much time she can go out on the weekend, like how much time she should spend doing her homework, and stuff like that.” (CF, 2nd interview)

The participants learnt that China is “a much more result-based society”, where the students’ life is “depending on how they do on one test, the Gaokao” to get into the university. And also with that “odd” one-child policy, the parents really want their one child to do well and succeed, so they put “a lot of their time and efforts” into their one child, and put “all that academic pressure on” their kid to study “really hard”.

4.3.4.2 Being Controlling

The participants usually have a more relaxed and less controlled relationship with their American parents. Their parents generally give them a lot of freedom to figure out what they want to do in life. Although parents may also offer their advice when they think that their children “could be doing better”, but they usually “stand back” and “trust” their children in making their own decisions,

“Like she [American mom] knows that I am going to do certain things, I am going to college for four years. I am going to try to get a job, but she is not telling me what job to take and how I get through college.” (TM, 2nd interview)

In China, the parenting style is more controlling. The participants thought that their host parents did not leave as much choice to their host sibling as their own parents did with them, however, they understood that their host parents have “high academic expectations for their children” in the more “result-based” Chinese society, and based on that expectation, they made decisions for their children,

“My host brother said to me that his dad has his entire college plan already planned out for him...but he seems fairly happy with that idea. The only thing that annoyed him is not his idea.” (TM, 2nd interview)

This controlling parenting style stems from the Chinese notion of *guan*, which describes parents’ dedication to their children through both governance and love, involving long hours of supervised practice of their children. The participants would think they are less supportive with this controlling parenting; however, for their Chinese peers, the pressure from *guan* is related to their parents’ caring support, thus they may have a high degree of pressure from their parents, but they still see their parents as supportive.

4.3.4.3 Being Protective

In Western society, parents see the ideal person as someone who stands on their own without assistance. Thus, they tend to focus more on cultivating their children’s self-esteem and independence. However, in Chinese society, parents think that their children are never mature enough to take care of themselves. Meanwhile, the increasing affluence

and shrinking family size mean parents can afford to devote more time and attention to their children nowadays,

“And she [the host mother] is like more -- more pampering than -- than the American parents. She'll like buy her all the stuff during exam week and stuff.” (CF, 2nd interview)

This over-protective care may limit the development of their children's confidence in living independently and becoming socially immature. Comparing the protective Chinese parents to their own parents, the participants respected and had a better understanding of their parents' way to let them “learn from their own mistakes” and “to carve their own pattern life”,

“And I, now I agree with them, I think that is a good way, I thought it was a good way of growing up. So I did something, and it was bad, I learned from the consequences and I know not to do it.” (JM, 2nd interview)

However, they understood that as the result of the one-child policy, parents were “trying to make things convenient for their one child”, helping them have it easy and making them focus almost all of their attention on school. They also understood that their host parents' “over-protectiveness” was also “a level of caring” for them, and that their host parents “did not want anything bad to happen” to them in China.

Based on their understanding and their familiarity with their host parents, they started to negotiate for their independence. One student was talking with his host father in a joking way when his host father again said that the participant did not eat enough,

“I think the best thing is one time when my host father said you don't eat enough. I said that you eat too much. And we all laughed and that was really funny. They stopped saying I eat little about a week after that.” (JM, 1st interview)

4.3.5 Having My Home in Beijing

Staying with the host family is “definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience” for the participants,

“Getting to live with the host family, and living actually in the city, not like a college dorm or something, but like a family. And that’s worth.” (CF, 1st interview)

By reflecting back to their staying with their host family, the participants regarded their host family as a “buffer zone” between them versus the outside world, a place where they can go home and be understood,

“Oh, God, I'll be scary. Going without my host family, that will be difficult. There will be a lot of alone time. I would go out a lot by myself. En, (pause) I can see what would be good, what would be bad. Like I would be able to go out a lot more and I will be hanging out with a lot more people, but also when I went home whatever, I'll be all by myself, there'll be no one there like I can talk with.” (TM, 2nd interview)

“It's been really good. I -- I have nothing to complain about. They - If I really -- If I really needed to -- uh -- talk to someone, I know my host sister speaks good English so I can talk to her. I always have dinner with my host grandparents at least once a week. And we talked. So it -- it's been -- uh -- it's been a fun experience.” (MM, 2nd interview)

Although there would not be much a problem “in terms of that food, getting shelter, that sort of stuff”, without the host family, it would be like a situation that they either “had to get better or else you cannot survive”. Their host family is indeed a home away from home,

“Yeah. I feel like definitely we're getting close over the past four months, especially my parents, my sibling.” (JM, 2nd interview)

“...I live with them on a daily basis and eat with them on a daily basis. So they're really -- They're the people that I really -- uh -- am close with.” (MM, 2nd interview)

“Yeah. I think I really have a good relationship with my host family...I've been with them for quite a while now. So yeah, I do kind of regard them as almost my family now.” (AM, 2nd interview)

4.4 The Different Friendship

4.4.1 Defining Friendship

Friendship was formed through adolescent international students' social interactions with their co-ethnic and host peers. In general, a friend is someone who is "friendly" and "easy to talk to", with whom the participants would "enjoy being around" and "get along with". Specifically, the participants defined their friendship as "close" or "intimate" friendship and "casual" friendship. The typical words that they used to describe the close or intimate friendship are "understanding" and "trustworthy",

"They also have to be, I think they have to be open and understanding of each other, and maybe be able to not to judge each other as maybe they would be with other people." (AM, 1st interview)

Understanding means that there is "openness" between friends with whom they are able to "share things together", and who will not "judge" but "can see" them for who they are, and "accept it".

Trustworthy means that they have friends whom they "feel comfortable to talk to" and "say anything with", and whom they can "depend" or "rely on",

"And you need to -- um -- you need to be -- like -- trustworthy. You can't be -- You can't -- uh -- be telling secrets or going around and spreading rumors, that sort of things...and also -- uh -- show that you are trustworthy person so they can depend on you." (MM, 1st interview)

And whom they can ask for help,

"...I think it is a mutual thing, while you are willing to work for them and help them, you should be confident that they are willing to work for you and help you." (JM, 2nd interview)

4.4.2 Mingling with Chinese Peers

4.4.2.1 Having Delicate Differences

When they talked about their friendship in China, the participants used the word “casual”, saying that the Chinese students they became friends with were usually people who were “friendly”, who were “there”, and who could be a “company” to “hang out with” and “spend free time together”, and whom they could “talk to” although “not necessarily about anything”. They listed reasons such as the age difference, the limited time and the “subtle” differences in their interactions with Chinese peers that hindered them from making “close” or “intimate” friends that they wanted at school.

More specifically, the participants were always with Chinese students “about two or three years younger” than they were in class; and they usually had middle-schoolers who were “the most eager to improve their language” at English Corner. Although “the age was not that big of a problem”, age did “play a part”,

“If we got a lot of juniors and seniors in high school”, one student said, “we probably would have focused a lot more on discussions and talking...things that we have in common rather than play Charades...so I might have made more friends.” (JM, 2nd interview)

Besides the age difference, they talked about the “subtle” differences that included the duration of stay in China, the language barrier, and the sharing of same experiences or common interests to build up understanding or trust with Chinese students.

Understanding develops with over time, however, the only “real” time that they could interact with Chinese student was during the ten minutes breaks between classes, thus during the limited time, it was really “hard to have one-on-one talk to someone” and really “get to know” their Chinese peers. As well, regarding their one-semester duration of stay in China, one student said,

“There were always subtle things like I am not going to be here soon. At some point I'm gonna have to go home.” (TM, 2nd interview)

Their temporary stay made them feel “weird” in the sense that trying to make some friends while at the same time knowing that they would be “soon on a plane out of here” and would “probably not come back for a while”.

Being able to talk is an important factor for participants to make Chinese peer friends,

“...if I am able to talk to someone for long enough. I think, I usually become friends with them”, as one student said. (AM, 1st interview)

Initially, having their language as a barrier for communication, adolescent students would participate in school activities such as playing basketball that was “more just a physical activity” than talking. With their stay in China, they were able to talk and practice their languages with Chinese students at school, during lunch hour, between class breaks, through English Corner, or by playing basketball together.

“It is usually about my stay in China. I have many times get these questions how long have you been here, how long are you going to be here? But after those questions, I started talking about just, I am not sure, it was like little things. I mean a few people asked me exchange phone numbers with them. I was talking to them about what was happening during the day...So it was just like little conversations, small talks I guess.” (AM, 2nd interview)

Although these “little” conversations or “small” talks were something that connects the participants with their Chinese peers to start a friendship, they could not have “good” and “real” conversations that they could share things for mutual understanding as they were with their “core” group of friends in America,

“No matter how friendly we are to each other, there's always gonna be that language barrier and that's gonna be...a deciding factor... And then I get to China, and I understand I'm friends with a lot of these people, but at the very end of it, they're -- they speak a different language than me. In -- No matter -- Even though I understand a lot of it, it just -- it's not the same.” (MM, 1st interview)

When the participants gradually advanced their language ability, could “carry on” and understand more of the conversations, “it took a while” for them to realize,

“...because we didn't share the same experiences, and we would not necessarily know what the other person was talking about.” (TM, 2nd interview)

Without sharing the same experiences, the participants could not find out what topics they could talk about with their Chinese peers. For example, the participants were talking about things that interested them but “not popular” in China,

“I listen to a lot of music, but a lot of that music is just not available in China. So I just want to talk about that, or other things that interest me but just wasn't popular in China...But if I try to bring it to anyone in China, be like, oh, I don't know what that is.” (TM, 2nd interview)

“...’cause most of my friends are on the same sports team with. So I got a bunch of friends from my soccer team, a bunch of friends from my ski team, and a bunch of friends from my rugby team...But I am not much of a basketball or volleyball player. And so I wasn't able, I did play a little bit of basketball, but I am not very good.” (JM, 2nd interview)

Their topics were generally around the participants’ stay in China, such as “How long have you been here”, “How long are you going to be here”, and “How long have you been speaking Chinese”; Or about participants’ particular school days, such as “What was happening during the day”, and “What was going on in class”; or on the differences between America and China such as “how different is life style in America”, and “how basketball is in America”.

These topics were seeking information instead of sharing understanding that was built upon the same cultural background, life experiences, interests, and language. Thus, these “subtle” differences, the different language, different life experiences, and different interests made it challenging to build up the understanding with their Chinese counterparts during their limited and temporary duration of stay in China, as one student

addressed that there was “not too much understanding of each other” to make “a bridge to the other person”.

4.4.2.2 Understanding Chinese Educational Structure

Regarding their school life in China, the participants talked about *the structure of the education*, such as the “really high level curriculum”, about “the division of sciences” as Wen Ke or Li Ke depending on the focus of the students on social sciences or natural sciences, and about the classroom setting where “the students stay in one of the classrooms and teachers come around”, where “the class sizes are normally 40 or 50 kids”, and where “the range setting is by height” with the “separate” desk arrangement.

The frequent topic was around teaching and learning. In the U.S., the class teaching has “less memorization” but “more of interactions” between the students and the teacher, and most of the classes involve that “the teacher asks the students questions” and students “respond actively the entire time”. Whereas, in China, it is “less interactive”, more “lecture-format” teaching method, and “a large amount of rote memorization”, with less emphasis on “critical thinking” in the learning process,

“During the entire class, I think the only one who speaks is the teacher unless the teacher calls them, maybe 2 or 3 students. So for almost the entire class, the students just are just sitting there, listening attentively to what the teacher's saying...they are not really actively participating the lesson.” (AM, 2nd interview)

“I found it is interesting that almost every class I have seen so far...the students...have to memorize different texts and then will recite them to their teacher or...they have to memorize things and then regurgitate them on test.” (AM, 2nd interview)

Although they were not sure which one would be a more effective method of teaching, they noticed how this teaching and learning method influenced the students in China,

“In the US, students certainly have respect for teachers. I don't think it is the same as I've seen in China. I don't think I've seen a student openly correct the teacher in China. I heard that it is incredibly disrespectful and I see it many many time in the US, freely correct teachers.” (AM, 1st interview)

The Chinese students are “certainly very diligent” in their studies, and they are very good at “memorizing facts and reporting things”, but they “have more trouble applying knowledge”, and they are lacking in “creativity”. Comparing the classes in America where “questioning” or “arguing” is especially emphasized, and where the students “learn by questioning” and try to “figure out what is right”, they were thinking the lack of creativity and knowledge application may be “a downside of just memorizing everything” and “having a teacher tell you everything and not really interacting in class”.

Other than the teaching and learning methods, the participants also understood how other external factors, such as the Gaokao, the government one-child policy and the helicopter parenting style influenced this younger generation. They talked about their experience with Chinese students outside of the class, such as at the school club,

“It was not incredibly studious and everything is like, everyone [Chinese student] asks questions, everyone is speaking very freely.” (AM, 2nd interview)

“It was interesting because we got to have -- like -- a whole uncensored -- what a Chinese kid in this society, in this school system, actually thinks. And it wasn't just about the Gaokao. It was what they thought about their workload, what they thought about their teachers, what they thought about culture, what they thought about the government...I can really really see -- uh -- what they, and their generation...really thinks about things. And that really influenced -- uh -- the kids here.” (MM, 2nd interview)

4.4.3 Bonding as a Group with Newton Peers

4.4.3.1 Getting Connected like a Web

The everyday interactions of the Newton group happened in various social settings, i.e., in the summer orientation program, in their travel around China, and at

Jingshan school. Over the four-month course of the exchange program, the participants were bonded as a group, doing activities together, relying on each other and helping each other out,

“I think we kind of did rely on each other through the course of the exchange. And I think we became closer as a result as well.” (AM, 2nd interview)

The summer orientation program

The participants were from two public high schools at Newton. Some had met each other before the exchange program, but it was not until participating in the program that they did “weave a lot” to “group up”,

“And we are also split North and South... I always thought of South like a place other kids went... I thought they're just like other people that I don't have to deal with them.” (TM, 1st interview)

They thought it was “a little strange” with students from the other school. In the six-week summer orientation program, they would socialize, for example, meeting and talking about going to China, or trying to plan outings. And they found themselves “a lot more comfortable” with each other and did “kind of” know each other.

Interaction within and without Jingshan School

While staying in China, the participants had lunch together, organized school activities together, hung out together, and traveled around China together. These experiences helped them stay close to be as part of the exchange group.

Traveling around China together

Traveling around China was a time when the participants were away from Beijing and their host family, and were “only” with their teachers and peers from Newton. As a group, they were being with each other for 24/7 during which they would go places

together, eat meals together, and take buses to places together. They stayed very close and became “more comfortable around” their Newton peers,

“During those trips, we actually were like very close because at that point, there were not host families, there are only us, like the teachers, like the American teachers, they are part of the group.” (TM, 2nd interview)

Hanging out together

In their spare time, the participants hung out together, such as exploring the city with the subway, taking day trips after school, or doing some outings on the weekend.

One participant talked about their tour to famous spots in Beijing,

“The other exchange students and I, we have plan for some outings. Like every weekend, every Sunday, if there is a conflict, we will do that on Saturday. One of us decides a place in BJ to visit. So we meet up and we go on a tour or go see a famous spot.” (TM, 2nd interview)

Having interactions at school

At school, all the exchange students got together with their American teacher, and ate lunch together. They shared what was going on with their life in China, they recounted what had been happening outside school, they compared different experiences, different interesting stories, and different things they’ve done, and they discussed the different teaching style at school. As a bonded group, they helped each other out, helping with school issues (e.g., essays, journals or understanding books), with homesickness, or with confusing situations in the host family.

The participants had times that they were “split”, and had disagreements that were “big” enough to become very “intense”. However, “taking in China together” where they were having “a new experience”, the participants learnt to “compromise” to stay as a group and get connected “like a web” to support and get along with each other,

“But this has been sort of like a -- uh -- a new experience for me 'cause I was sort of just -- You know, you -- you sort of have to get along because it's us three and that's it for four months.” (MM, 2nd interview)

“...although mostly because I think that support results from the type we are taking in China together and we have to support each other unless this program doesn't work very well for any of us.” (AM, 2nd interview)

4.4.3.2 Being able to Talk

In China, being able to talk to their Newton peers in their own language helped them not feel homesick, to be understood and to maintain their ethnic identity,

“It was like, it was another way like to be with my friends like in America because that was something I talk to them. That would be nice there is someone there I can talk to.” (TM, 2nd interview)

Here, being able to talk to was to have company when feeling isolated or homesick.

With the language as a barrier, the participants could not clearly explain their ideas and be understood especially at the beginning of their stay in China,

“Because instead of, I think in the beginning, when I was, when I was mingling with my Chinese classmates, there would be talking about things, and I would be really confused because I had no idea what was going on... There was only one I was able to talk to were my teacher, MM and JM.” (AM, 2nd interview)

Being able to talk to their Newton peers enabled the participants to stay closer as a group,

“Whenever we are out together, we talk about our life here in China. We compare different experiences, different things we've done.” (JM, 2nd interview)

“I found as time is gone on, I've learned a few things about my friends. We do activities together in China. And when we have gone traveling, and I definitely become more comfortable around them than I was when, I think, we started at the summer program.” (AM, 1st interview)

Being able to talk to Newton peers about “what is going on with their life in China” gave them the sense of confidence that they were able to do things themselves,

“And then we didn’t really like help each other like we never like solved anything but like by being with each other, we knew we could do it, like being with each other, it gives us the confidence like being able to do things for ourselves.” (TM, 2nd interview)

Also, being able to talk and sharing experiences with their Newton peers let the participants “be able to look at other people’s experience” instead of just relying on their own. This learning from sharing experiences together might contribute to their adjustment when facing similar situations, in particular confusing situations at school and with their host family,

“I think in these four months that we've all gone through some times in school sort of confused. We didn't really know what was going on. And we knew that we could - - uh -- talk to each other and sort of learn from [sharing] experiences together.” (AM, 2nd interview)

Further, being able to talk in their own language kept them connected back to America. For participants, it was a way to connect with someone “on a personal level” from the same cultural background and not be “completely” separated or “cut off” in a “completely” different culture,

“... ’cause they -- they're really the only the three Americans I have seen or that I’ve talked to for four months. So it's really them that's keeping me connected to -- uh -- back to America.” (MM, 2nd interview)

4.5 Language as a Barrier

As part of Chinese culture, Chinese language was interrelated and reflecting the culture. To practice and improve their fluency in Chinese was one of the reasons that motivated these American students to participate in the exchange program. Also, for the participants, trying to learn to speak what the local people are speaking helped the participants connect more to the people in China as the way to gain better global perspective.

Initially, they were worried and “mentally under-prepared” because they were self-conscious of their low language level and limited vocabulary, and they “did not necessarily have someone there helping with Chinese”. For the participants, learning and practicing the local language in “real life” situations was a process, from language as a barrier in daily communications and the survival language, to practicing language in social interactions and learning language skills, to having improved language ability and carrying on conversations. Through this process, the participants became more confident and more comfortable speaking Chinese; they understood more of people’s conversations, and had better Chinese to explain and be understood in confusing situations.

4.5.1 Being able to Survive

Most of the participants had the experience of taking a Chinese class in or out of school in America,

“I think the language classes I've taken before has definitely helped me a lot because without them I would've struggled so much”, as one student said. (AM, 1st interview)

They also participated in the Exchange’s summer orientation program that stressed “practical stuff”, helped “keep the participants’ Chinese skills up” and “boost their language”. In the program, they could learn not only “what everyday life in China was like”, but also “the vocabulary that you're actually going to need to survive in China”, such as “what words you would need to use at a bank or in a restaurant, how to get on the bus or train, or how to order food”, and so on. However, as one student stated,

“You go through four years of language in high school...follow a textbook...and you learn a lot of words, but you don’t know necessarily if they’re useful or not.” (MM, 1st interview)

The Chinese that the participants had learned in America helped them to be able to survive at the beginning of their stay in China, meaning that their language level was able to “help find their way around”, or “help understand more of the city” that they were in with the map both in Chinese characters and Pinyin¹³,

“I thought that I was gonna be mentally under-prepared but it actually worked out, mainly because when talking to locals it wasn't really a discussion. It was usually just question-and-answer, where -- Where's the bathroom? Where can I find a good place to eat? What is good to eat here?” (MM, 2nd interview)

Or help bargaining that would not require “extensive vocabulary” but a few words like “the numbers, too expensive, the highest price and stuff like that”,

“So I don't think bargaining was a problem for any one of us. Plus, a lot of places, if you wanted to bargain with them, even if you tried to speak Chinese, they still gave you a calculator and type the numbers.” (JM, 2nd interview)

Instead of getting into full length conversations with the locals, this was the question-and-answer survival language, mainly asking questions and trying to understand the answers. As the participants were so self-conscious of their not being good enough linguistically that they may have wrong words, tones, pronunciation, or word order, or not extensive vocabulary in their speaking with Chinese, they would “not speak that much”, or even stop “a bit” from communicating more with Chinese. And they also worried about surviving or becoming a “burden” to their host family,

“At that point, my Chinese wasn't that great and I thought that making them wait and making them have to translate, do all these things would sort of, oh I guess, hinder them rather than help them. I would be -- um -- almost a nuisance because I -- I was the one person that didn't understand, that didn't get it.” (MM, 2nd interview)

¹³ Pinyin, or Hanyu Pinyin, is the official phonetic system for transcribing the Mandarin pronunciations of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet in the People's Republic of China. (Cited from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinyin>)

4.5.2 Having Difficulty Getting Points across

During their stay in China, language was becoming a barrier in participants' daily communication, their listening and speaking comprehension in particular. It was "hard" and challenging for the participants to "get their points across", or to hear and understand what other people were saying in their daily activities, such as in the restaurant, or in the taxi,

"I was ordering food. And for some reason, I just couldn't get down what I wanted to say. And that was eventually a waitress, just said it in English, I like, oh! Kill me!" (TM, 2nd interview)

"I would talk a lot to taxi drivers, that is sort of thing. And there was something [sic] that we couldn't get an idea across. That would be stressful." (TM, 2nd interview)

"My teacher asked me to order some Wonton Soup for him because he has seen someone order it. And I wasn't sure how to say that in Chinese, so I kind of threw words together... So I think the waitress interpreted that as best as she could, and brought him a bowl of egg drop soup." (AM, 1st interview)

The participants were so self-conscious that they would not speak "that much", or they talked to people who spoke other than Chinese at school, for example, their Newton group or the Chinese English teachers,

"Whereas at first, if I listened to something, even I knew all of the vocabulary, I wouldn't understand a thing 'cause they just speak so fast... And they would be talking about things and I would be really confused. There was only one I was able to talk to were my [American] teacher, MA and JS [American peers]." (AM, 2nd interview)

Since they were not as confident in their Chinese ability, and in saying or making it clear what they wanted to do, a lot of ambiguities arose in their talks which bred confusing situations with their host family or at school,

"Cause if you are not confident in talking, if you're not confident in trying to get your point across, you're really gonna have a tough time because you can't -- you're not gonna be able to understand. You're not gonna be able to get through to people." (MM, 2nd interview)

For the participants, communication means to be able to get their points across and also to understand what other people are saying. With their host parents in particular, the communication was challenging in the sense that with the language *barrier*, the participants lost their independence but needed help from others such as their host sibling to get their points across,

“And my host brother is not around to translate it, it's been a little challenging to try to get my point across and to hear what they are saying.”

Though later on, they could understand the questions, it took “a little longer to think of answers” because they had to translate in two languages,

“...especially when I had to translate the Chinese into English, and think about it, then translate my English into Chinese it takes a while,”

This was misinterpreted by their host parents,

“Instead of they gave me a little more time to think, they would have -- they would bring my host brother and have him translate for them.” (JM, 1st interview)

Not being able to speak clearly for themselves, the participants also lost their independence to be in charge of their own behaviors,

“And I mean a lot of times it's hard to really say what I want 'cause especially if I want to talk about a subject with my host parents... say if something I really want to do and I should be able to do, it's hard to say that in Chinese.” (JM, 1st interview)

These language barriers made the participants feel challenged, stressed, embarrassed, and confused. They felt challenged about carrying a conversation with a person or something else would not happen if they were on their own without help with language; they felt stressed that they were not able to perform basic activities, such as ordering food in the restaurant or trying to ask for directions; they felt embarrassed about “asking someone to repeat what they say, especially when they [the local people] start to

get a little bit frustrated”; they were confused because in the beginning “they had no idea what was going on when mingling with the [local] people”.

4.5.3 Pushing through Language Difficulties

4.5.3.1 Being Motivated

In this learning process, the participants might have “no idea” what others were saying, especially toward the beginning, the situation was “completely messed up” and created lots of misunderstandings in conversations,

“I would have these people speak to me in Chinese, at first time, I had no idea what they were saying, but then I just found it so difficult.” (TM, 2nd interview)

They have determined to “push through” language difficulties. They had people to speak to them in Chinese, and asked for the right words; they talked more and tried “as hard as possible out in the world”; and they pushed to speak and listen to their host parents at home,

“...besides my host brother, my two parents, host parents don't really speak English very well. They speak Chinese to me and if I want them to understand me, I speak Chinese to them. So it really pushes me to speak and listen which is just something I wouldn't be able to do at home, or my host family knew English very well.” (JM, 2nd interview)

More specifically, they “forced” themselves to “go with certain words”, or to “stream together a meaning” that “was like out of necessity”; they became aware of something wrong, learnt from the corrections, and would “say differently next time” or use different ways to try to get their point across, such as choosing “different aspects to describe something”.

4.5.3.2 Practicing Language in the “Real Deal”

Talking with the locals helped the participants get better with Chinese at different social settings, and they learned the way people ask and say things in daily social interactions,

“Basically, how I got better with language was just by talking, just talking with my host sister, talking with my host family, talking with students at the school, going out -- going out after school and just buying things, talking to the locals.” (MM, 2nd interview)

At school, their Chinese peers were “eager” to help them learn Chinese. They corrected the participants’ improper tones, wrong words or wrong pronunciation, and they taught the participants new vocabularies and the context to say them,

“Like if I’m playing basketball with them [the Chinese students] at lunch...They will say, ‘Oh, that means pass’, or ‘that means jump’, or just sort of stuff like that that I can, could use when I’m, I can play with them.” (MM, 1st interview)

They also explained to the participants what they were learning in class,

“In class, they’ll say -- they’ll try to explain to me what they’re learning in Chemistry or what they’re learning in -- um -- geography, and what that means in Chinese and what that is in English.” (MM, 1st interview)

Outside of the school, the participants were practicing Chinese on their “own accord”, talking with people, asking and finding out more information. They learnt everyday words from the local people,

“I learned the way people ask, say things ’cause when I was, when we were purchasing something, people asked me *kuai* to say how much, like ‘how much *kuai* is this’. While in the US, when you were learning speaking Chinese, you were told to use *renminbi* or *yuan*, but never *kuai*. No, that was improper. But when I got to China, that was used everywhere.” (AM, 2nd interview)

In particular, there was lots of talking with their host family. At home, they *spoke* to their host family at the dinner table, or while watching Chinese TV,

“But -- yeah -- I think it’s definitely -- uh -- especially at dinner is where I usually attempt to speak Chinese to her [host mother], and then she’ll try to teach me -- uh --

some Chinese words, and I think that that dinner presents a place for me to try out my language.” (MM, 1st interview)

“And while we were watching TV, we talked to and if I have a question about what's going on and I asked, and actually, a while ago, I found this Chinese TV show that I really like to watch with my host sister called Xiao Ao Jiang Hu.” (AM, 1st interview)

The topics were usually around school issues, language study, future plans, trip experiences like “where did you go” and “what did you see”, or general ideas of China.

As one student said,

“My host mom lots of times quiz me on my Chinese which is interesting.” (TM, 2nd interview)

In these talks, their host family helped in their speaking ability by speaking slowly.

The host parents were always trying to “tell the Chinese meaning of English words or the English meaning of the Chinese words they used” to help participants with language,

“So instead of speaking English, they [the host parents] are trying to tell the English meaning of the Chinese words they use. That helps me tremendously in my speaking ability.” (AM, 2nd interview)

Through this language practice in these “real life” situations, the participants were going through a learning process from sitting there and managing to understand the conversation to becoming part of the conversation,

“There are definitely a lot of discussion that goes on... But for most the time, I am sitting there, I am trying to understand like the conversation that's is going on between them...But every now and then, I become part of the conversation, and we will talk for a while over dinner, and then maybe a few minutes after dinner, we will continue talking sitting at the table even after everyone was done eating... I think this is especially when we have guests over. We will sit at the table for seems -- like twenty minutes and just talk.” (AM, 1st interview)

4.5.4 Carrying on more Conversation in Chinese

Although their language was still considered as foreigner's Chinese and they were still “nervous” to use it, the participants were getting better in listening and speaking. By

the end of the program, they could understand more of others' conversations and were able to carry on more conversation in Chinese. In turn, their improved language ability made them more interested in learning a lot more Chinese,

“Now I can understand more of their conversation, I actually, I was in an amusement park a while ago with Abby and a couple of her friends, I was actually in a conversation with them in Chinese. I think it is much more interesting. So I can learn a lot more of Chinese.” (AM, 2nd interview)

They participated more in conversations or talking,

“...it's much harder to initially start a friendship because of that language barrier that I was talking about... I think it did. I think I -- I was able to participate more in conversations or talking than I did before. And I think they [Chinese peers] -- they recognized that and they -- so they -- sort of -- talked to me more too.” (MM, 2nd interview)

They also became more confident in their communication skills, and felt “more relaxed talking to people” out in the world,

“In Beijing later on, I talked to people in the subway, and I've talked to people who asked me like basic questions, and I asked them questions. We had a conversation.” (JM, 2nd interview)

4.6 Our Different Development Path

Participating in this exchange program was “a real deal” for these American adolescent students,

“I mean as much as you prepare for something, nothing can really prepare you for the real deal. I learned about Chinese culture, I read books about Chinese culture, but there's nothing that can really give me the same experience as living in Beijing.” (JM, 2nd interview)

Having their stereotypes and expectations in mind along with their uncertainty, anxiety and worry, these adolescent exchange students landed in a country with a distinctive different culture where they had their daily interactions with the local people in various social contexts. From having culture shock to enhancing their cultural

awareness, to understanding the cultural differences; from having confusing, disagreeable and misunderstanding moments with their host parents, to understanding the Chinese parenting style, to respecting their host parents' wishes and being understood; from having different friendship to the Gaokao, the different teaching and learning methods, to understanding their Chinese peers; from being preoccupied by the crazy driving culture and the crowded subway to riding the subway as the normal part of routine, they had been through a unique development pathway that was different from their American peers.

In their unique experiences, they immersed themselves in the Chinese culture, learnt and developed their strategies for mutual understandings based on their increasing language skills and increasing knowledge of the host culture,

“My strategy sort of developed over time, where I just -- It was really me -- just me growing more confident in my ability to explain my case... I just used what I'd learned here and I sort of put that towards what I wanted to do. So I was able to sort out of the social landscape by using my knowledge of the culture and the language.” (MM, 2nd interview)

Over time, they gradually broke through the culture and language barriers, enjoyed living their Beijing experience, and felt like a Beijinger. More specifically, through their unique experiences, their different life pathway from their American peers, they were more open-minded to cultural differences and more flexible to go with the flow, they took more responsibility for their own behavior and avoided conflicts, and they tried to negotiate through understanding others as well as being understood.

At the end of the Exchange program, they were “basically the same person”, however, having been in China for four months, when facing difficult situations, they were more mature and more confident in handling things that “life threw at them”, and

pushing their way through. And they saw the differences “as way of life”, and had a different worldview that may impact their future pathway.

4.6.1 Going with the Flow

Regarding their interaction with people that were “a lot different from what they were used to”, the participants were planning to be open-minded, flexible and compromising,

“I was aware that I could have anyone or any family as a host family, so I was open to them, I was open to the outcome...I am not sure I was maybe prepared for every outcome. But I was at least prepared that I would have, something unexpected might happen. And I just go along with it.” (AM, 1st interview)

They tried to be open to new ideas and ways of thinking,

“And I think I am more flexible and open to new things, new ideas coming out because there are just so much over there. So I'll take everything, more try.” (CF, 2nd interview)

And they tried to go along with something unexpected, follow the rules, and try to “fit in” as much as possible,

“And somebody that goes on this program, or program like this, you're definitely not always gonna get your way. I mean they want somebody who's opinionated, like, who has sort of a vision for what they want, but, at the same time, you just have to compromise and work it out.” (CF, 2nd interview)

4.6.1.1 Complying with the Host Parents

They were aware that it might be “a burden on the family if they did not go along with their rules” and “blend in on the receiving end”,

“And if there are something I tried to listen to them [the host family] as much as I can 'cause really I am in their country, I should follow their culture.” (JM, 1st interview)

“We're in China. It's their household...I should play second fiddle. They're -- It's their show and I'm following it.” (MM, 2nd interview)

When facing situations that might challenge them, and things that were different, confusing or annoying, the participants would try to be open and flexible, look at them from the points different from what they expected,

“I can't do it because I am not mature. It is more of -- I think they just want to support me more.” (AM, 2nd interview)

Although they “definitely” watched more carefully in China about a lot of stuff that they were allowed at home in America but not at their host family, the participants gradually became fine with those rules and respected their host parents’ wishes,

“But in China, I noticed that everyone is really sensitive to cold here. And so my host family, especially earlier when it was much colder in BJ, they were constantly telling me to put on more layers, put on more layers. But I would be too hot, I don't want to put on more layers. And eventually I just accepted it and just put on more layers. And if I got hot, I take them off when they weren't there.” (JM, 1st interview)

Coming to understand highly protective parenting as a level of caring and feeling that their host parents really “had their best interests in mind, trying to do what is better for” the participants, and “really did not want anything bad to happen”, the participants learnt to be more open and flexible. Then, things that seemed to be confusing “eventually became clear and revealed themselves”.

“I mean I don't mind it anymore 'cause I follow it into routine.” (JM, 2nd interview)

4.6.1.2 Taking Responsibility for One's Own Behavior

By following the rules, the participants were becoming more responsible for their own behavior. They had more control of their visual emotions in public,

“Just over there [in China] like, it is just more shocking for them to see openly say the emotion or something. I am sad about something. You should not show that in public. It is just something visually.” (CF, 2nd interview)

They would be more tactful about sensitive topics (e.g., politics), and they would comply with the family rules and try to avoid conflicts,

“I mean I'm ok with the curfew stuff, I don't think I'll probably go anywhere that late. Maybe there will be a party, I guess if they [the host parents] will not let me go, I just don't go.” (CF, 1st interview)

“...like 6 which is normally we have dinner...it is reasonable if I should tell them when I am getting back and I tried to get back at 6 or maybe a little earlier. Like if the day comes when I am out late at night, I will ask them if it is ok.” (AM, 1st interview)

“But if there is really something I need to do, or I have to be able to do, I will go to them and I'll talk to them. We'll discuss what should be done and we'll come to a compromise.” (JM, 2nd interview)

They were becoming much more mature, more controlled emotionally, and more careful of their own behaviors. In this way, they made their host parents understand they were able to look after themselves,

“I mean it's got to the point now, I can say hey, I am taking the subway, and go here. And they just say, ok, be careful, bye.” (AM, 2nd interview)

4.6.2 Earning Independence

4.6.2.1 Making Their Own Decisions

In America, parents generally encourage their children to “figure things out” for themselves instead of relying too much on the parents. As for these exchange students, they made “a lot of” their own decisions relating to everyday things they did. However, their decision-making obviously also depended on “what the situation was”, or “how important the decision was”,

“But very important decisions like going to China, what colleges to apply to are stuff that are important enough that I definitely talk to my parents beforehand.” (JM, 1st interview)

For these adolescent students, these important decisions would be better made if they consult someone, like their parents or friends, because they knew they were “not the World’s expert”, because they knew their parents “had their best interests” and “had more experience” than himself.

Especially, with regard to their decision to participate in the exchange program, it was difficult, and it “took a while” for the participants to make their final decision,

“...it was a little conflicting ’cause I realized that I would be missing the entire, like essentially half of the year of my high school education in the US which I will be spending in China, I will be missing out a lot of opportunities and things I can take part at school.” (AM, 1st interview)

Then the supports from their parents and friends helped,

“Yeah, I mean, I think it was tough for me to make the decision because it's -- I realize how long that four months is, the whole second semester. But I think that -- Obviously my parents were really supportive of me during this. They thought it is a great idea and my friends too.” (MM, 1st interview)

They would “gauge” their parents’ advice, and take their parents’ counsel into consideration,

“Um, so I respect what they [his parents] can come up, but I also make a self-determined decision.” (MM, 1st interview)

But ultimately they were the ones to make the final decisions about what they would do,

“Yeah, I think that, this was definitely a good decision and I am glad that I decided to go to China.” (JM, 2nd interview)

4.6.2.2 Negotiating through Mutual Understanding

More than language inability, confusing and disagreeable moments were also because of the unawareness and the misunderstanding of the cultural differences. As their

knowledge of the culture and the language grew over time, their individualism based on a “pure” cultural standpoint was changing,

“I was used to if I needed something, I could just go out myself and get it. But -- so there were definitely some conflicts at first but after I knew they didn't want it, I either asked them afterwards if I could do it or not do it.” (JM, 1st interview)

Being able to explain was a way for the participants to earn their independence and avoid conflicts,

“...as time went on I was able to sort of explain why I wanted to do these things, why I thought I should be able to do these things and they understood and they listened, which -- um -- which I really appreciated.” (MM, 2nd interview)

And they also have learnt to advocate for themselves with the host family in order to be understood,

“...throughout time, as my knowledge of the cultural grew, as the knowledge of the language grew, I was sort of also to push what I thought onto them and have them understand.” (MM, 2nd interview)

This advocacy was more of a negotiation than a conflict based on their increased understanding of the host culture, their improved ability in speaking the host language, and their increased confidence in the ability to explain and make their points heard and understood. Through their negotiation based on mutual understanding, they gained their independence in the host culture.

4.6.3 Seeing the Differences as a Way of Life

Having been in China for four months, the participants were “basically the same person”, and they were still unique selves,

“I think that when I get back home, my parents are going to continue to raise me the way they have, and I am continuing being raised the way they've raised me.” (JM, 2nd interview)

“I think for the most part I haven't changed. I thought I was going to change like a lot, but I mean I am still the basically the same person...a hard-working maybe a little bit anxious about some things. I guess that kind of stuff doesn't go away.” (CF, 2nd interview)

“Because it is just, four months isn't enough to change who I am, like it gives me a unique experience of a different culture and lets me to know more about myself.” (JM, 2nd interview)

However, having been through a pathway different from their peers in America, the participants became more mature and more confident. When facing difficult situations, they were more confident in pushing their way through, they were more confident in handling things that life “threw” at them.

Also, being in a “totally” different place, and experiencing a “totally” different culture, the participants gained a better global perspective, “a different understanding of China”, and its culture,

“I mean that it felt weird to come back to Newton after seeing all of the things we used to because it is not like the center of the world anymore.” (TM, 2nd interview)

“Yeah, so I think as far as to conclude this trip, I think I have gained maybe an understanding of China...maybe like how the ideology and the customs differ from the US.” (AM, 2nd interview)

This different worldview enabled them to “see the world through the broad scope of things”,

“I think that will affect us and change who we are, but I don't think it is a completely different person. I think that it is a person who understands the world a little better, and understands the different culture.” (JM, 2nd interview)

Also, it might influence their future pathway, such as the study of Chinese language or international business with China,

“I will be pursuing linguistics. As for the profession I'm not sure but something has to do with [Chinese] language.” (CF, 2nd interview)

“It's the defining moment in my life because it's sort of like the culmination of my wants, my desires, over --- over my life so far and how it's pushing me towards the future, especially when what I am interested in or what I'm interested in going into, like international business.” (MM, 2nd interview)

And this list could go on, like one student addressed,

“I think I'll probably go back to China since I am really passionate about it. I will probably do something with Chinese...I really like China. And I'll do something that, and it is, I am not sure, I don't know. It is just essentially interesting.” (TM, 2nd interview)

CHAPTER 5

A MINI-CASE STUDY

What motivated JM to participate in the exchange program was to “go and immerse” in the Chinese language and further his Chinese studies. He also was curious to go beyond the familial context to see the world through his own eyes, and expect to have “a life changing experience” in the “real deal” in China,

“I mean as much as you prepare for something, nothing can really prepare you for the real deal. I learned about Chinese culture, I read books about Chinese culture, but there's nothing that can really give me the same experience as living in BJ.”

Though he was anticipating differences in China, JM was worried and afraid about whether or not he could “survive” in China,

“Because despite having learned so much about China beforehand and being told so much what to prepare for...I was afraid initially before I landed in China because I wasn't sure how what I knew would be enough.”

He was so uncertain that he felt “almost a little bit in the dark”, and that he was anxious about what more to expect,

“There are always a few things that are missing that I didn't read about it, I didn't hear about or look, or see or learn, so those arose themselves as culture shock.”

After his flight landed in China, the differences were so sudden and “hard to grasp” that made the group just “kind of taking everything at stride”. In the first few weeks, staying connected with America through technology (i.e., Skype) helped JM with homesickness, “it would be much harder for me to do this if technology wasn't what it was like today and I could keep in constant - constant contact with them [American parents]”. JM used an example in his group's first around-China trip to describe how he felt losing connection with America,

“Since we were on the trip we were basically going from hotel to hotel, and I expected - I was expecting the hotels to have internet access or WiFi, but they didn't,” he continued, “So I was cut off from America”.

However, the “real deal” by living and having social interactions with the family and at the school in China, went beyond his expectation and led to misunderstanding and confusion,

“Other stuff that I read about, I know about but I didn't really, I didn't expect much as I should have, so like the misunderstanding that occurred was something I knew about but I wasn't really expecting it to be as much as I should have. And so, at first, it confused me.”

5.1 Living in the “Real Deal” with the Host Family

After his landing and welcoming meeting with his host family at the Beijing international airport, JM felt “more relaxed” and much more at ease,

“But then when I came here, I actually was putting into the situation that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be...I think it's just natural. The worrying's worse than the action itself.”

JM also developed a good relationship with his host brother, they shared similar interests and did activities together,

“For example, he and I both like soccer. We both like golf. And we both like running. So we can do a lot of activities together for sports. When at the house, we were not doing anything, or with my entire host family, like with my parents, we play board games, and sit and talk like a family.”

Since JM's host brother spoke “very good English”, in situations such as “if my host parents will say something that I don't understand”, or “if they [host parents] don't know how to say a word and I don't know in Chinese”, the host brother would help JM with translation for communication. However, in situations that “my host brother is not around to translate it. It's been a little challenging to try to get my point across and to hear what they are saying”.

In particular, misunderstanding and confusion continued to emerge in the host family from daily activities such as eating and wearing clothes, however, it was through these confusions and misunderstandings that JM's learning journey in the "real deal" started.

Regarding eating, although "the food like what you eat and when you eat is more important in China than in America", it was probably the most confusing issue for JM,

"...there is probably the thing we argue the most about is how much I eat and so they constantly said, you are not eating enough, you are not eating enough. And I am saying, I am full, I am full, I cannot eat any more."

JM continued to talk about reading to the subtext in his host family, about how his host family would observe how JM reacted to build up their assumption about what JM was saying, which, however was "not necessarily true" and was going beyond what JM was really addressing,

"So if I didn't eat something 'cause I wasn't hungry, they think I didn't like it... I think it took a couple of weeks, or a week or two of me telling them that when I say I meant. So if I am not hungry, meaning I am not hungry. It doesn't mean I don't like the food."

JM also stated that his host parents, being helicopter parents, controlled a lot more than his American parents,

"I am used to being able to choose my own clothes and I know the temperature outside, I know how I feel like in that temperature...but here, in the winter, even though I personally will be fine with T-shirts and shorts, they [the host parents] would force me to wear three layers before I go out."

And he continued,

"Another thing is to go shopping. So if I needed some -- if I needed shampoo, if I wanted to buy some food, they don't allow me to go shopping by myself."

In the States, JM's parents, "almost the opposite of the helicopter [Chinese] parents", gave him "a lot of freedom to figure out who I am and what I am and what I

like by myself". Although they might offer their advice along the way, "ultimately" his American parents allowed JM to make own decisions and "learn from consequences",

"My personality, I don't like to be supported that much because my parents had allowed me to do a lot on my own".

Through these confusing daily activities with the host family, JM felt having less freedom and more restriction and losing a sense of independence. He learnt that a lot of "stuff" that he could do in the States were not allowed to do in China. He also learnt how his actions were "thought of" by his host family, and "definitely watched more carefully" in China.

5.1.1 Practicing Language in the "Real Deal"

Meanwhile, having the language as a barrier made JM feel challenged, embarrassed and confused in daily interactions. He felt challenged and embarrassed about carrying on a conversation with the host parents if he was on his own without help with language,

"Especially when I had to translate the Chinese into English, and think about it, then translate my English into Chinese it takes a while,"

And this was misinterpreted by his host parents,

"Instead of giving me a little more time to think, they would have - they would bring my host brother and have him translate for them."

Not being able to talk and explain clearly, JM lost his independence to be in charge of his own behaviors,

"And I mean a lot of times it's hard to really say what I want 'cause especially if I want to talk about a subject with my host parents... say if something I really want to do and I should be able to do, it's hard to say that in Chinese."

This situation, however, also “pushed” JM to speak more in Chinese with his host parents who “don’t really speak English very well”,

“They [the host parents] speak Chinese to me and if I want them to understand me, I speak Chinese to them. So it really pushes me to speak and listen which is just something I wouldn’t be able to do at home, or my host family knew English very well.”

With his language practice in the “real deal”, JM became more confident carrying on conversation in Chinese to get his points across and be understood by his host parents. He also felt “more relaxed talking to people” outside his host family,

“In Beijing later on, I talked to people in the subway, and I’ve talked to people who asked me like basic questions, and I asked them questions. We had a conversation.”

5.1.2 Understanding the Cultural Differences

More than language inefficiency, the confusing and disagreeable moments were because of the unawareness and the misunderstanding of the cultural differences. While practicing the language, JM’s knowledge of the culture also grew over time.

Reflecting on his most confusing moment when his host parents were “constantly” saying that he was “not eating enough”, JM said that “China is a very food-related culture”, lot of “stuff” such as how people communicate and interact are “centered” around food,

“Like a lot of the family interactions that go on occurred at the dinner table or in a restaurant. If I want to meet with my extended family, my grandparents, my uncles, my aunts, we go out to dinner and talk.”

He explained that treating guests with abundant food is a Chinese way to provide the host’s generosity and graciousness, and show their guests hospitality and respect,

“So I think that the food is an important part of Chinese culture and that the Chinese people here in BJ are really proud of their foods and my host family wants me to eat as much as possible and try as much as possible.”

JM further addressed the trait of indirectness in China that caused ambiguity when confronting the trait of directness in the States. As he gradually learnt that Chinese culture is “not a very direct culture”, JM came to understand why his host parents read into the subtext, meaning that his host parents went beyond what JM was “simply” saying or trying to get across, and looked “a little deeper” into how JM would “act” and “react to certain things”, and thus gain and “build up” assumptions about him,

“They [the host family] had assumptions of how I acted that was not necessarily true because I wasn’t totally aware how the way I acted was being thought of, how my actions will make them think...And so that was really the misunderstanding that occurred between my host family and I, or me.”

Concerning his host parents’ helicopter parenting style, JM suggested that this over-protective parental care might limit the development of children’s confidence, independence, and social maturity, however, he understood that as the result of the one-child policy, Chinese parents were “trying to make things convenient for their one child” to focus their attention on school. He also came to realize that his host parents’ “over-protectiveness” was also “a level of caring” for him because they “did not want anything bad to happen” to him in China.

5.2 Having a Different Development Path

5.2.1 Going with the Flow

JM gradually became fine with family rules and also learnt to respect his host parents’ wishes, he continued with his wearing clothes example,

“When it was much colder in BJ, they [the host parents] were constantly telling me to put on more layers, put on more layers. But I would be too hot, I don’t want to put on more layers.”

Since he understood that the highly protective parenting as “a level of caring”, and that his host parents “really had his best interests in mind”, JM were more open-minded and flexible,

“Eventually I just accepted it and just put on more layers. And if I got hot, I take them off when they weren't there.”

He would comply with the family rules to avoid conflicts,

“But if there are really something I need to do, or I have to be able to do, I will go to them and I'll talk to them. We'll discuss what should be done and we'll come to a compromise.”

As he followed the family rules into daily “routine”, things that seemed to be confusing “eventually became clear and revealed themselves”.

5.2.2 Negotiating for Mutual Understanding and Earning Independence

Based on his increased understanding of the cultural differences and improved language ability, JM also started to advocate for his independence,

“I think the best thing is one time when my host father said you don't eat enough. I said that you eat too much. And we all laughed and that was really funny. They stopped saying I eat little about a week after that.”

His advocacy was more of a negotiation rather than fighting for mutual understanding,

“I was used to if I needed something, I could just go out myself and get it. But -- so there were definitely some conflicts at first but after I knew they didn't want it, I either asked them afterwards if I could do it or not do it.”

5.2.3 Seeing the Differences as a Way of Life

Having been in China for four months, JM felt his host family was a home away from home,

“Yeah. I feel like definitely we're getting close over the past four months, especially my parents, my sibling.”

Being immersed in a “totally” different place, JM gained “a different understanding of China” and its culture. His “unique experience of a different culture” enabled him to “see the world through the broad scope of things”, and also “to know more about” himself,

“I think that will affect us and change who we are, but I don't think it is a completely different person. I think that it is a person who understands the world a little better, and understands the different culture.”

CHAPTER 6

THE CONCLUSION

By following the psychological and socio-cultural adaptation of a group of American adolescent exchange students in a large metropolitan city in China, the study explored how in their daily interactions, the participants built up interpersonal relationships and made friends, learnt the language and began to understand cultural differences, and hence developed a sense of belonging, i.e., as a Beijinger, and achieved their self-actualization, i.e., a better self. Through in-depth interviews of these participants, this study traced their changes in relation to their psychological and socio-cultural adaptation to different social settings, particularly within the host family and at the host school.

These adolescent students' learning through social interactions, especially with their host parents and peers impacted largely their understanding of cultural differences and host language acquisition (Figure 2):

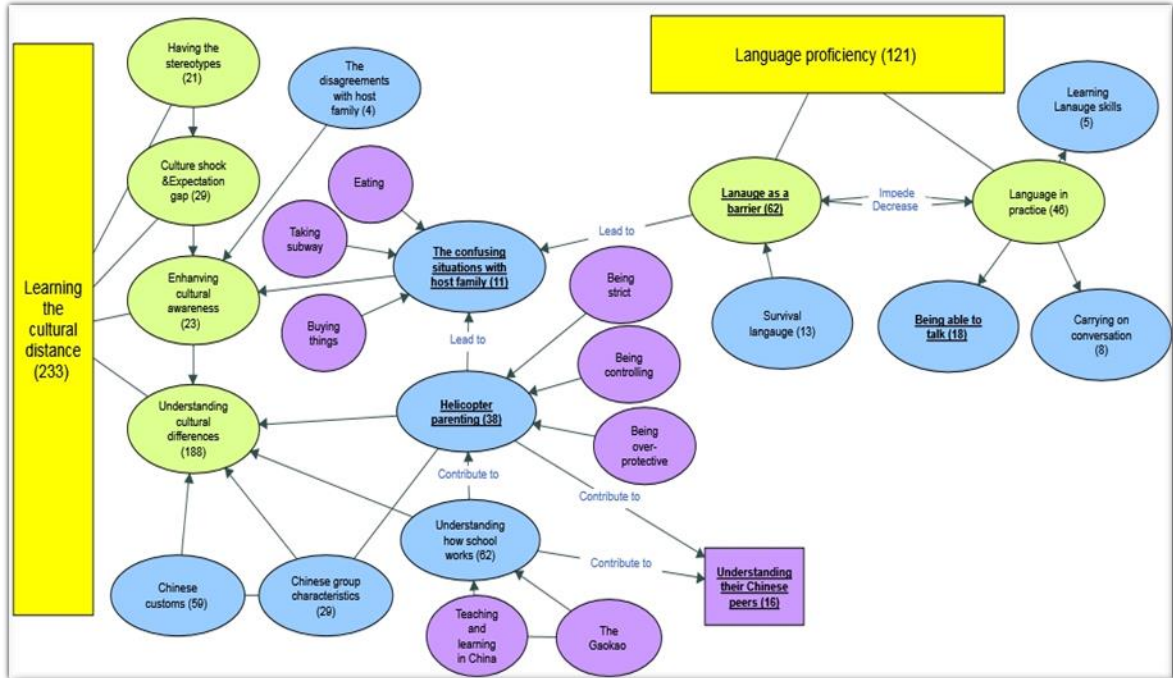


Figure 2: Theoretical coding _ the learning process

As shown in Figure 2, this learning is a process in which the adolescent students went from having stereotypes and culture shock, to enhanced cultural awareness, and then to the understanding of the cultural differences. Having grown up in America has made the participants “not really put a priority on the world”, however, through their participation in the exchange program in China, they became aware of the cultural differences, knowing how the local people live, act, eat, and talk differently. Over time, they had discarded some of the assumptions and developed their understanding of the cultural differences. In this process, they need to be open-minded, be flexible and “go with the flow”, like the Chinese saying 入乡随俗 (When in Rome do as the Romans do) although understanding does not necessarily mean that they have to accept the differences.

More than simply knowing of the differences, these participants were going much deeper and digging out the reasons why there exists the differences instead of having

judgmental viewpoints that may create conflicts in the adaptation process. For example, they used to have stereotypes of their Chinese peers, e.g., hard-working, less mature, “a little spoiled”, nationalistic and having strict gender roles. Based on their daily observation and interaction, they came to understand how the test-based teaching and learning school system, and the strict, controlling and over-protective helicopter parenting were intertwined to affect their Chinese peers.

Also, this is a learning process for the adolescent students to improve their host language ability, in which they went through different levels of language learning, from the survival language, to the language as a barrier, and then to the improved language ability, that is, improved spoken language to carry on conversation, or better listening ability to “understand more of people’s speaking”. Having the language as a barrier made the participants lose confidence, and they were confused, and felt awkward, embarrassed, challenged, and stressed (Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Through their language in practice in their social interactions, being able to talk was the way for surviving, communicating, and connecting in the host culture, especially the way to start a friendship, initiate a conversation, and get points across to be understood.

For adolescent students at their developmental stage to seek self-development toward independence and autonomy, they are in need of parental guidance, support and peer friendship. Research has shown that in the absence of parents or guardian in the host culture, adolescent international students were especially vulnerable to isolation and loneliness, and required emotional support and close supervision from other significant adults in the host culture (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006). It was suggested in this study that adolescent exchange students’ satisfying social relationships, especially with their co-

ethnic and host peers, and their host families could help overcome their adjustment stress (Figure 3):

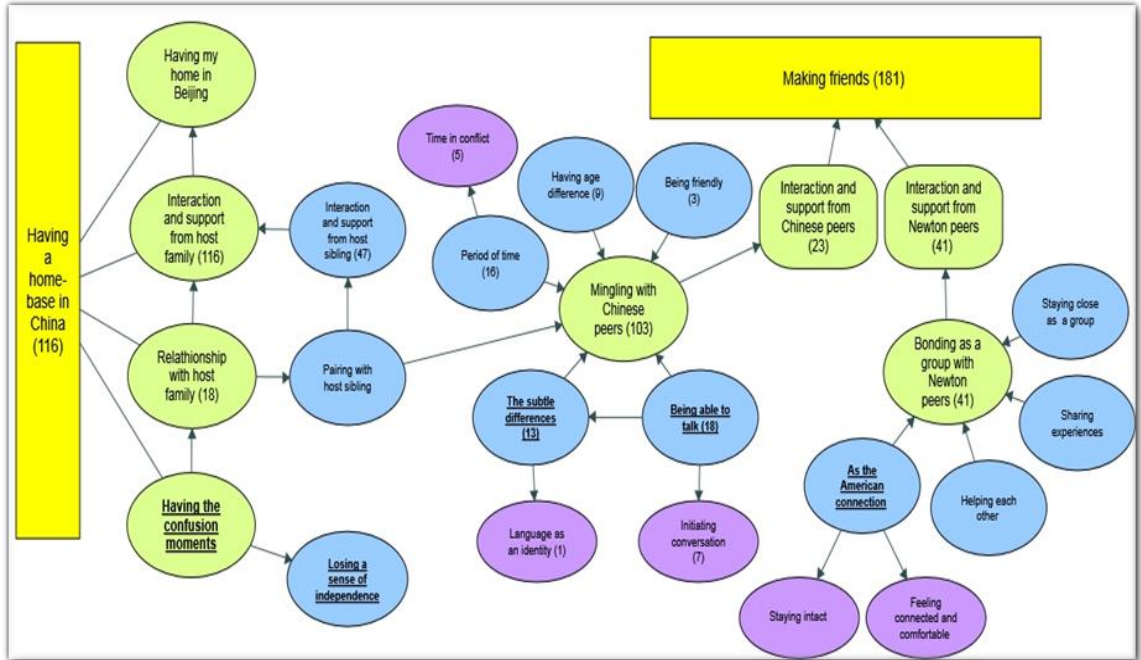


Figure 3: Theoretical coding _ the acculturation process

As shown in Figure 3, friendship was developed through participants’ social interactions, however, the friendship functioned differently with their co-ethnic and host peers (Bochner, *et al.*, 1977). With their co-ethnic peers, being able to talk in their own language and sharing life experiences helped the participants with homesickness, be understood and maintain their “American connections”. In various social contexts, such as in the Newton summer program, in the trips around China, and at Jingshan School, the adolescent students were “bonded” with their Newton peers as a group. As a group, they stayed close, and would together have lunch, organize activities, hang out and travel around. Specifically, being able to talk in their home language and sharing about what was going on with their life in China gave the participants the opportunity to look at each

other's experiences instead of just relying on their own, and obtain the sense of confidence that they were able to deal with similar situations at school and with their host family. Also, being able to talk in their own language connected the participants with "someone" with the same cultural background "on a personal level", meaning that their Newton peers were the "American connections" in China. These connections helped the participants stay attached back to America and feel "intact".

However, although participants expressed their motivation and showed their confidence in making Chinese peer friends, having "close" or "intimate" Chinese friends was challenging. They described their Chinese peers as "casual" friends, as people who were "friendly", who were "there", and who could be "company to hang out with" and "spend free time together". They listed the "delicate" differences that hindered them from making "close" or "intimate" Chinese friends, such as the duration of stay in China, the language barrier, and the different life experiences or common interests. These "delicate" differences were obstacles to building up the "understanding" and "trustworthy" relationships with their Chinese peers at school.

Specifically, as friendship develops over a period of time, however, the only "real" time that the participants could interact with their Chinese peers were limited by their temporary stay in China, mostly at school where they had help from their Chinese classmates with classes and language learning. Also, having the host language as a barrier, the participants could not have "good" and "real" conversations that they could share things for mutual understanding the same way as with their "core" group of "close" or "intimate" friends in America. They managed to reconcile the "delicate" differences and emotional tensions by using the temporal time strategy that they would return to their

home country after the temporary stay in the host country, however, without sharing understanding that was built upon the same cultural background, life experiences, interests, and language, their talks with Chinese peers were mainly seeking information.

Outside of the school, the host family played an essential role in these adolescent students' adjustment to the host culture, and the host family was a home away from home, "a buffer zone" where the participants could "go home" and be understood. The daily interactions with their host family allowed them to "partake in real Chinese activities" and practice their language. Especially, they made Chinese peer friends through their host siblings, learnt Chinese words with their host siblings, and understood Chinese social issues from their host siblings, and they also had their host sibling's help to communicate effectively with their host parents.

However, the host family was also the place where these adolescent students encountered the most confusing, disagreeable and misunderstanding situations. These participants were encouraged to be independent and make their own decisions by their American parents, however, their independence and opportunity to make decisions were constrained by their host family's helicopter parenting style (i.e., being overly protective, being controlling, and being strict) in daily activities concerning eating, buying things, wearing clothes, and taking subway. Also, with their inefficient host language ability, communication with their host parents was challenging in the sense that they needed help from their host sibling to get their points across and also to understand what their host parents were saying. They felt losing a sense of independence and having less freedom, and they learnt to "definitely" watch more carefully.

As shown in Figure 4, it was through this confusion, disagreement and misunderstanding in various social contexts, in particularly with the host family that the adolescent students’ learning journey in the “real deal” started. And based on their improved host language ability and increased knowledge of the host culture, these adolescent students gradually developed their strategies for mutual understandings.

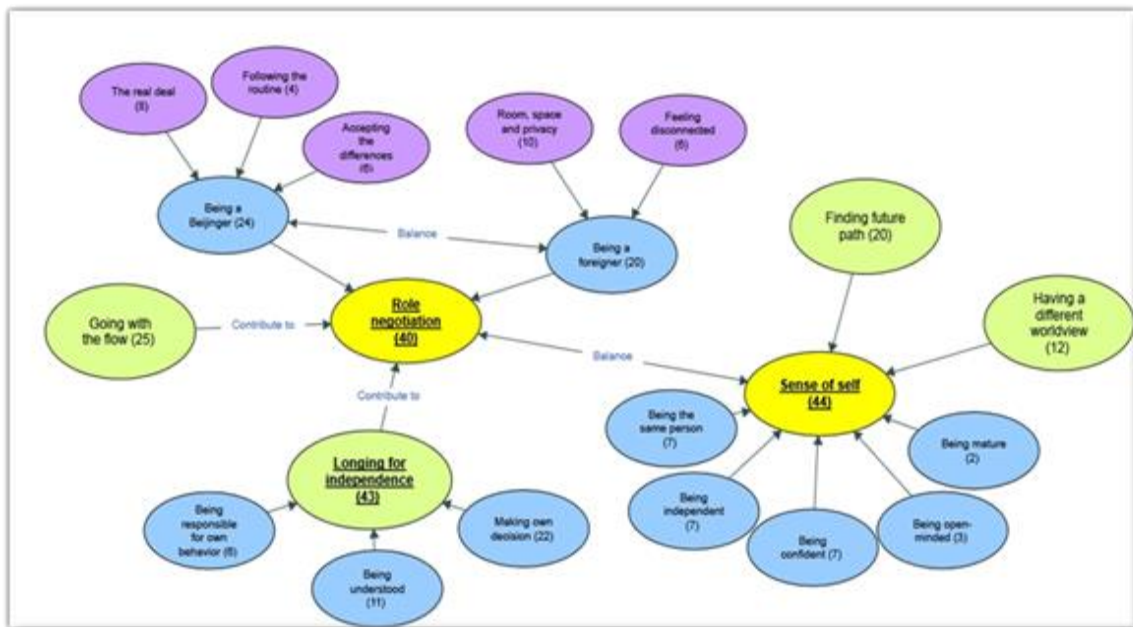


Figure 4: Theoretical coding _ the developmental process

In this “real deal”, these adolescent students became open-minded and flexible to “go with the flow”. When facing situations that were different, confusing or “annoying”, they learnt to look at them from the points different from what they expected. They had come to understand that the highly-protective Chinese parenting style was a level of caring, and that their host parents really had “their best interests in mind”, and “really did not want anything bad to happen”, and were “trying to do what is better” for them, and thus, they followed the family rules and respected their host parents’ “wishes”. For

example, they would comply with the family rules to avoid conflicts, and they also learnt to “compromise” and “make sure” that they could give a good impression instead of “openly” and “visibly” showing their emotions in public. By doing so, they showed to their host parents that they were able to look after themselves.

Whereas, on the other hand, at the developmental stage, these adolescent students were longing for independence although they might “gauge” their parents’ advice and take their parents’ counsel into consideration before they made their own decisions. As their knowledge of the host culture and the host language grew over time, the participants stayed more emotionally controlled and took more responsibility for their own behaviors, especially, having their understanding and familiarity with their host parents, they started to advocate for their ideas with the host and earn their independence. With their enhanced confidence in the ability to explain and make their points heard and understood by their host parents, this advocacy was more of a negotiation rather than a “fighting” for mutual understanding.

Compared to their home peers, these adolescent students experienced a “unique” path where they had gone through “something” that was “really” impacting them, and that might influence their future professional and life choice. Till the end of the exchange program, they developed a better sense of self, had a wider worldview and saw the cultural differences as “a way of life”. They became more open-minded and more flexible to “go with the flow”, whereas, they also learnt to negotiate through mutual understanding and earn their own independence. Over time, these adolescent students became much mature and more confident in handling things that life “threw at them”

beyond their expectations. They gradually broke through the culture and language barriers, enjoyed living their Beijing experience, and felt like a Beijinger.

CHAPTER 7

THE ANALYSIS

Having been discussing and thinking about the dynamic and iterative aspect of data analysis, I am starting to explore the interconnection of “emerging” concepts, aiming for theoretical application. This study has suggested that acculturation is not a term simply referring to adjustment to a different culture, but more of a psychosocial process that happens in participants’ daily interactions, in which they had confusing, misunderstanding or even conflicting time with the locals. Through these social interactions, the participants became familiar with the host cultural norms, values and styles, and thereafter had their changed behavior and mentality, and also a growing understanding of self-identity.

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore how participants’ behaviors were shaped through social interactions in their immediate host cultural contexts, and understand the meanings of their experiences in order to discover the basic psychosocial process of their adjustment (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012, p. 692; Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011; Glaser, 1978). Moreover, through the philosophical lens of symbolic interactionism, the researcher was seeking to learn what these experiences meant to the participants, how both their interpretations of the situations and their behaviors changed, and when and why they changed (Charmaz, 2014).

Moreover, using symbolic interactionism as a structure to explore the psychosocial process of participants’ adjustment, that is, participants’ interpretation of the others’ behavior and its underlying meanings, and participants’ corresponding actions, it

may alter their “interpretation of what is, was, or will be happening” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 262). From past interactions and anticipated future interactions, these participants derived their understanding of the meanings of the others’ behaviors, and their “minded behavior” followed (Milliken, & Schreiber, 2012, p. 692).

Specifically, the exchange program provided for the participants the immediate social contexts, i.e., the host family and the school in which they were immersed through the way of daily interactions with the locals and among themselves. As they were expected to respond and act in light of the shared meanings of social objects and situations in the host culture, rather than reaching directly to a set of the immediate environmental stimuli and create an act or behavior, the participants would interpret the objects and the behaviors of others on the basis of their home cultural values and norms (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Blumer, 1962). These home values and norms were inferences about a shared perspective that the participants would expect “the reciprocal intention or cooperation of the other” in their home country (Perinbanayagam, 1975, p. 505), and that they took it for granted that their behaviors would be resonated and understood by the locals in the host country.

However, the meanings of social objects and situations that enable participants to communicate both verbally and nonverbally and understand each other’s intentions and actions in their home country were defined and denoted differently in the host nation. And they had the challenge of “finding out whether in fact the other would cooperate in creating a reciprocity of perspectives by presenting the evidence necessary to come to even a tentative inference” (Perinbanayagam, 1975, p. 505), and confusions, misunderstandings or conflicts arose in their daily activities with the locals.

Blumer (1962) argued that the meanings of social objects and situations are not inherent in nature, they could also be socially derived and modified through interaction process with others in the host culture (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Lauer & Handel, 1977). Although at the center of this study were the adolescent students' adjustment experiences, it was suggested that the others such as their American parents, and host family, peers and teachers significantly impacted on their adaptation. What was the role of the participants' parents in their decision-making to study abroad? Where did the participants look for help while confronting difficulties in the host culture? How did the participants' host family and school peers help them with language learning? And so on and so forth. These questions indicated the significant role of the others to these adolescent participants.

More specifically, their interpretations of the social objects and the situation in their immediate context might be "altered, rejected as inapplicable, or replaced by a perspective shared with the other actors the individual is interacting with" (Charon, 1979, p. 24). And "overlapping conceptualizations", that is, new meanings of the others' behaviors and actions might be developed (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012). These new meanings would inform and shape participants' lines of new actions in their future course of the same situation (Handberg, *et al.*, 2014; Benzies & Allen, 2001; Blumer, 1969), and accordingly, their changed behaviors for adjustment.

Further, the confusion, misunderstanding or conflict not necessarily arose from "dramatic matters, significant or noteworthy for those involved", but rather those that attracted the researcher's "immediate interest", even if "what occurred was mundane and ordinary" to those participants from their daily routine activities, such as eating, shopping,

wearing clothing, and taking subways. As Emerson (2004) argued that this “immediate interest” might reveal “a more intuitive, theoretically sensitive conviction that something intriguing has just taken place” (p. 469).

Moreover, although these “recurrent and unremarkable” daily concerns were often not “self-explicating” and “initially opaque and uncertain in meaning and implication”, they provided the “starting points and pushes for more empirical inquiry and comparison” (Emerson, 2004, p. 460). In this study, the “thick description” of the “key incidents” disclosed how participants’ daily ordinary routines led to their misunderstandings, confusions or even conflicts in their adjustment process, and followed by a process of self-loss, such as the loss of ability in clearly speaking and expressing own thoughts and ideas, to a new self-construction and changed behaviors. These taken-for-granted routines became “symbolic markers” of participants’ changed behaviors, from which “enlarged meaning” of cultural differences could be discerned (Charmaz, 2014, p. 262), and thus provided possibility for analytic sensitivity and lines of theoretical development grounded in the data (Emerson, 2004).

In summary, symbolic interactionism, as the *skeleton* and the structure, guided the analysis beyond the subjective experiences of the participants, and also beyond “spheres of implicit and even unconscious aspects of a social phenomenon” (Uwe, 2014, p. 6). Using symbolic interactionism as the substantive theory, the study went beyond the knowledge and meaning interpreted by individuals from their “practices and routines that make everyday life possible and work”, and aimed at developing “a theory of the phenomenon under study from the analysis of empirical material” (Uwe, 2014, p. 6). For example, from the participants’ explanation about how and why they felt the way they

felt in the process of adjustment could be discerned the concept of self and related psycho-social change through interactions with the others beyond “the individuals’ accessibility” (Uwe, 2014, p. 6).

By articulating with the content theories, the *flesh and muscle*, i.e., acculturation, learning and development theories, this concept could be evidently supported and explicitly interpreted. Further, by analyzing the gaps between the perspectives of the participants’ lived experiences and the dominant acculturation culture, the social reality of the participants’ adjustment was revealed as they went through a process of identity change, i.e., self-loss, self-identification, and self-attainment/development. Thus, this self-concept could be relevant to others in their adjustment to other social contexts, and has its theoretical implication as a generalized statement (Uwe, 2014; Wolcott, 2009).

CHAPTER 8

RECOMMENDATIONS

For adolescent international students, it was suggested that certain contexts might be provided where they could intermingle with others and build their relationship up in the host culture, particularly within the school context where they spent most of their time. In this program, there were typical immediate contexts at school (e.g., at English Corner, at School Club, or in class) where the participants not only had interactions with Chinese students but also with their Newton group, and gradually they developed their relationship with their peers, both Chinese and American.

Other than having limitations in linguistic fluency, a language barrier also arose from ignorance and misunderstanding of the cultural differences. Since mutual understanding was built on their improved language ability to explain themselves, and on their understanding of the cultural differences, it was suggested that the intercultural orientation program may focus on individuals' cross-cultural skill development and language learning. Especially, regarding different language levels of the participants, having a more comprehensive language program catering to listening, speaking, reading and writing respectively would give them a freedom of selection based on the evaluation of their language ability.

The more collegial rather than hierarchic close relationship with their Newton chaperones made the participants feel that they could have someone on whom they can rely, and by whom their concerns would be taken into consideration in the host country. In this study, it was their American teacher(s) that the participants mostly went for help

when having problems with their host family or facing general issues at school. Further study may explore and understand how the role model of their Newton chaperones would affect their adjustment in a different culture.

For the participants, it would be much harder to be abroad if the on-line technology was “not what it was like today”. Using the on-line technology (e.g., Skype, Sina, Weibo, etc.), the participants were able to “stay connected with America”, knowing that they always had “a connection back home” even when they were “half way across the world”. Although most topics with their parents were about “general day-to-day matters”, the “connection” with their family in the America was the way for them to “reflect on what is happening and share with someone”, and help with homesickness. Future research may study how to use the on-line technology to help participants with adjustment stress, especially at the first few weeks when the differences were so sudden and “hard to grasp” that made the participants “kind of taking everything at stride”.

Also, the participants talked about gender issues in China, for example, “the strict gender roles in China”, especially the guys were “more reluctant to talk or socialize”. Future study may explore how the gender differences may impact on friendship formation in the host culture. They also talked about privacy, in particular their personal space, and the different time concept that created “annoying” situations at the household and the school. Future study may investigate how the different concept of physical distance across cultures, such as having physical touch in China versus keeping physical distance in the States, and the concept of time, such as the always changing time in China versus the linear time in the States, and their impact on individuals’ social interactions.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Could you briefly describe what you learned from your previous international experience, i.e., your trip to Israel for your Bar Mitzvah? Did that experience help you to achieve more in pre-departure orientation program? In what way did it help (e.g., enhance your cultural awareness, etc.)?

2) What motivated you to participate in this program?

3) Was it conflicting for you to decide to spend one-semester in China, being away from your family and friends? If so, could you specify reasons for this conflict?

3.1) In your life, do you always have self-determined decisions? Do you ask suggestions from parents or peer friends? Comparably, whom do you ask more for suggestions, parents or friends? Could you give me some examples?

4) How would you like to describe your relationship with your parent(s)? Are they supportive of your abroad study?

5) What was your expectation of studying in China? Has it been changed when you are in China?

6) From your background information sheet, you said that Chinese language classes help your adjustment in China. Could you give three examples on how these language classes help you to communicate with the nationals (your host parents, your Chinese peers, and etc.)?

7) You also mentioned that Chinese cultural lectures help your adaptation. Could you list at least three life events you feel different (negative & positive) in Beijing, describe in details why they are different, and how you deal with the differences?

8) Did you have the culture shock shortly after your arrival in Beijing? To what degree did you feel lonely or homesick?

9) What did you do mostly in your first few weeks in Beijing? Could you give me some examples on what challenged you the most in the first few weeks away from your Newton peers and teachers?

10) As for friends, what do you usually do with friends in Newton? What are the general topics in your conversation with your friends?

11) Is it easy for you to make friends? How would you like to describe the relationship with your friends, close or casual?

- 12) What is your definition of friendship? What do you think the most important qualities to be friends? How content are you with your friends?
- 13) Did you expect to make peer friends in China prior to your departure to Beijing? Could you describe your expectation of having friends in China?
- 14) Have you had the chance to intermingle with Chinese peers in school? Have you made some peer friends so far? What are the difficulties to make friends in China?
- 15) Did you have some expectation of your host-family in China prior to your trip to Beijing? Did you contact your host-family?
- 16) Do you have the key to your host-family house or apartment? Do you have curfews in Beijing? Have you had difficulties to follow your host family rules?
- 17) When you have some disagreements with your host-family, what are your strategies to deal with them? Did they work? Could you give me some examples?
- 18) Whom did you contact the most until now? Please list general reasons to contact them.
- 19) Do you keep in touch with your parents and friends in the States? How often do you communicate with them? What are the general topics?
- 20) Whom do you turn for help if you have adaptation problems, your parents, Newton peers, host parents, host peers, and etc.? Could you give me some examples?
- 21) What do you do in your spare time? Do the activities you do in your spare time help you to understand more of China? How?
- 22) Do you keep a daily log in China? What is your purpose to keep a daily log?
- 23) What have challenged you the most so far in Beijing? Could you give me some examples?

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH REQUEST FORM (REQUEST FOR RESEARCH ACCESS INCLUDED)



**Newton Public Schools
100 Walnut Street
Newtonville, MA 02460**

617-559-6115

**Cynthia Bergan
Assistant Superintendent for
Secondary Education & Special Programs**

The following procedures must be followed by persons requesting the use of facilities or students in the Newton Public Schools for research purposes.

1. A letter formally requesting permission to conduct research must be sent to this office by the principal investigator. It must include:
 - a. Names and duties of all persons involved in the conduct of the research.
 - b. Research goals.
 - c. Relevance of research to the Newton Public Schools.
2. The form on the back of this page must also be filled out and returned to the Office of Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education & Special Programs, 100 Walnut Street, Newton, MA 02460
3. To complete the information we need before making a final decision, the researcher must submit in writing a step-by-step procedure for the conduct of the research. Copies of all research instruments and permission forms that the researcher intends to use must also accompany the research request.
4. The request will be evaluated according to the following:
 - a. Is the research relevant to ongoing programs and activities? Will the study provide information that will be useful to principals and teachers?
 - b. What assurances can you give which will ensure that the anonymity and safety of students, teachers, and the school will be protected?
 - c. Is the research design technically sound?
 - d. Will the research interfere with normal school routine?

5. If approved by this office, we will notify principals describing the research and asking if they would like to have their schools participate. If a principal is interested, we will notify the researcher to get in touch with that principal. It is then the researcher's responsibility to secure permission from the principal to conduct research in that school.
6. The researcher agrees to send a written report of the findings to the principal(s) of the school(s) involved and to this office.

Request for Research Access

Name of Person Requesting: _____ Date: _____

Home Address: _____

Official Status: _____

Institution: _____

Phone: (Office) _____ (Home) _____

Name of Supervising Professor (if any): _____

Names of all who are involved in this research and their duties: _____

Title of Project or Study: _____

Purpose: _____

Needs: _____ Age or Grade Range: _____

Number: _____ Sex: _____

Amount of Time per Student: _____

Other: _____

Previous Contacts in Newton (if any): _____

Date Project or Study Will Begin: _____

Date Project or Study Expected to End: _____

Brief Description / Comments: _____

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH REQUEST LETTER (REQUEST FOR RESEARCH ACCESS INCLUDED)

Dear Ms. Bergan,

My name is BinBin Zhu. I am a doctorate student in the Educational Administration program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I am also a Newton resident. I am writing for the permission to continue to conduct my dissertation research involving Newton Public school students participating in the Newton-Jingshan Student Exchange program.

In the increasing student studying abroad trend, secondary school students are becoming the fastest growing group and participating in various student exchange programs in many Western countries. However, cross-cultural research and theories that have been mostly developed to study immigrant adults are not necessarily applicable to children and adolescents at their formative stage. Thus, this research is aiming to explore high school students' acculturative experience, investigate their different acculturative pathways, and identify their mediating strategies in their daily interactions in the host culture.

As the oldest student exchange of public secondary school students between the United States and the People's Republic of China, the Newton-Beijing Jingshan School Exchange program was established in 1979 in an ethnically diverse community. Unlike other short-term exchange programs (e.g., summer camp) around the greater Boston area, this exchange is a one-semester medium-length program. Hence, it provides an ideal research context to explore students' acculturation experience in their daily intercultural interactions with the locals in Beijing, China.

Students' participation will entail a one-hour exploratory interview along with a completion of a background information sheet. The face-to-face exploratory interviews would be held at students' convenience (e.g., the time, the place, etc.). The interview is to

investigate students' motivation to, understanding and expectation of the student-exchanging program; to understand their challenges resulting from their daily interactions with Chinese peers, teachers, and host parents; and to explore their strategies in their adaptation to a different cultural context.

I will use fictional names for all participants. I will assure the confidentiality of the interviews in accord with research law. The recorded tapes in the interviews will be retained only by BinBin Zhu, and will be stored in a secured and confidential location. They will not be used for any other purpose than the present research. Further, the Informed Consent Letters will be signed and kept both by the students and BinBin Zhu. And if at any time during students' participation in the study the students wish to withdraw, they may do so with no negative consequences. To this same end, risks associated with this project are expected to be minimal.

The findings from the study would increase understanding of the exchange effects, and attribute to the notion that the exchange experience positively contributes to the attitudinal, behavioral, and cognitive changes in the participating students. They would also increase the awareness of exchange benefits and opportunities on the part of the public, educational, and governmental sectors of both countries by pointing out specific effects on the educational and professional development of exchanges in general, around Newton in particular. The researcher would send a written report of the research findings to the principal(s) of the Newton public schools and to the Office of Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education & Special programs in the end.

I hope I could have the chance to continue my dissertation research with Newton Public school students participating in Newton-Jingshan Exchange program. I believe the research in the end will benefit not only my academic pursuit but also this exchange program.

Sincerely,

BinBin Zhu

School of Education, UMass Amherst, MA 01002

Request for Research Access

Name of Person Requesting: BinBin Zhu

Date: 01/18/2013

Home Address: 410 Homer Street, Newton, MA, 02459

Official Status: Doctorate Candidate

Institution: School of Education at UMass Amherst Phone: 413-244-5259

Name of Supervising Professor (if any): Professor Andrew Effrat

Names of all who are involved in this research and their duties:

BinBin Zhu is the only one to get involved in this research and conducting all the interviews.

Title of Project or Study:

Acculturation stress, psychological and sociocultural adjustment, and development of American adolescents in China: A qualitative study of Newton High School exchange students in Beijing, China.

Purpose:

It is to explore high school students' acculturative experience, investigate their different acculturative pathways, and identify their mediating strategies in their daily interactions in the host culture.

Needs:

Age or Grade Range: No Limit. Number: No Limit. Sex: No Limit.

Amount of Time per Student: One-hour interview.

Other: Some extra time is needed to fill in a simple background information sheet and a survey questionnaire at the students' convenience.

Previous Contacts in Newton (if any): I have had previous contacts with this program for the past two years.

Date Project or Study Will Begin: Feb., 2013.

Date Project or Study Expected to End: 2014.

Brief Description / Comments:

I have been with this program for two years. It is a well-organized and efficient program. And the program director is very helpful.

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

03/01/2013

Dear XXX (student name),

My name is BinBin Zhu, and I am a graduate student in the Educational Administration program at the University of Massachusetts. I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting for my dissertation research. Before I can accept your consent, I want to make known to you the following information pertaining to this study.

The purpose of this interview is 1) to investigate your motivation to, understanding and expectation of the student-exchanging program prior to your departure for China; 2) to understand your impression resulting from your daily interactions with Chinese students, host-families and teachers in Beijing; 3) to study your observation and understanding of American students' intercultural adaptation challenges in China; 4) to know about your strategic suggestions to students studying in a different culture. Your participation will entail a one-hour interview along with a completion of a background information sheet. With your permission, the researcher may tape-record the interview.

I will use fictional names for all participants, and for the schools as well as the district. I will assure the confidentiality of the recorded tapes by maintaining these same in my position in accordance with the research law. The recorded tapes will be retained only by me and will be stored in a secured and confidential location. They will not be used for any other purpose than the present research. To this same end, risks associated with this project are expected to be minimal.

Your willingness to give your time to participate in this project is appreciated. If at any time during your participation in the study you wish to withdraw, you may do so with no negative consequences. Your identity will not be revealed and your responses will be confidential.

I stand firmly behind confidentiality laws, and will maintain them throughout this study. I will ensure that all information is in a safe place and is not shared with others. If you have any questions at all regarding this research study, please feel free to call BinBin Zhu at (413) 244-5259 bzhu@educ.umass.edu. You may also contact my academic advisor Dr. Andrew Effrat at (413) 658-5807 aeffrat@educ.umass.edu, and/or our Graduate Program Director Dr. Linda Griffin at (413) 545-6985 lgriffin@educ.umass.edu.

I, _____ hereby state that:

- The study has been explained to me
- I understand all of the information pertaining to this study.
- I have been given a signed copy of this document.
- I accept participation in this study.

Signature of Prospective Participant _____ Date _____

As the investigator of this study, I, BinBin Zhu hereby states that all of the information above is true to the best of my knowledge. Participants have volunteered to be part of this study and are aware of what it entails. They have been told that all information will remain confidential and will not be shared with others. They have been informed that no names will be used throughout the study and that they may release themselves from the study at any time with no consequences.

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE OF RESEARCH JOURNALS

Research Journal # 05-12-2013

Keyword: Interviews

Interviews with pre-structured questionnaires developed from the comprehensive literature review, or questions developed from previous interviews and participants' journals, addressing the idea to investigate and understand the context from participants' perspectives, thus generate new ideas or concepts.

I have been thinking of the concept to understand the social phenomenon that is under investigation from The Participants' Perspectives in the Natural Settings, specifically relating to doing interviews. In another word, this is an Understanding of their Experiences and Stories at the Site. But how to put this concept into practice has been a challenge for me. Especially, since my research is largely based on interviews, the questions I am going to ask the participants may directly influence how much detailed information I may garner for my understanding of their adaptation process.

First, I repeatedly read their journals, and the transcribed manuscripts of our first interviews that are with pre-structured questions. I read them word by word, and line by line, then write down comments and circle new phrases that have not been talked by previous literatures. By going through this process, I realized how constraint my first interviews were. The participants had to go with the researchers' questions based on doing a comprehensive literature review, thus limited the participants' opportunities to Tell Their Stories. Thus, new themes or ideas were rarely shown from the data sets. Having realized this, how I could do the interview differently?

Staring at the words "from the participants' perspectives", I may try to ask questions differently. For example, they just came back Beijing from their trip to Shanghai. Thus, instead of asking questions like "what is the cultural difference between Shanghai and Beijing", I may ask "tell me more about your trip to Shanghai". Then from

their descriptions of trip to Shanghai, I may further ask questions addressing specific situations in their descriptions. Another example is that they were talking about the source of most cultural misunderstandings were from their host grandparents. I may ask question like “tell me more about the confusing situations with your host grandparents”, then go further to ask specific questions relating to their strategies dealing with those confusing situations. The purpose of changing the way of asking questions is not only to garner detailed situational descriptions from the participants but also lay a basis for the readers to know how the researcher could make her conclusions from these in-depth interviews.

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE OF ANALYTIC MEMOS

Analytic Memo # 11-11-2013

Keywords: Stereotype, enhancing cultural awareness, & understanding cultural differences

AR (1st interview) is saying that his cultural awareness may have been “enhanced by maybe studying, like more intensely studying Chinese culture. But I am not really sure I would’ve wanted to enhance my awareness of cultural differences. I feel like if I focus too much on cultural differences, there will be so many things I would miss”. His saying seems to be contradictory to previous studies that being aware of the cultural differences may open the participants’ minds and positively impact on their adaptation. Why is he talking about this in a negative way?

He explains later on, saying that if I “focused too much on cultural differences, I may unconsciously focus on negative differences...the other things that I wanted to pay attention to...that would interest me and leave a profound imprint on me if I notice them”? Meanwhile, he is giving an example of Chinese students do “more like hands-on in their interactions with each other between classes...play to wrestle at the back in the classroom”, saying in the US the interaction “would happen to such an extent”.

Obviously, instead of enhancing cultural awareness, he is more like talking about the culture discrimination resulting from the cultural conflicts of different cultures. For him, being aware of cultural differences may make him “unconsciously focus on negative differences”, which may go too much to such an extent that he may disagree with or even discriminate against them. This discrimination may hinder him from opening his mind in his adaptation to the host culture, although the example he used is more like youth activities instead of much reflection of the culture.

Further, stereotypes can influence intercultural interactions in different ways, negative or positive. As for LL (1st interview), she is “pretty opinionated”. While

comparing the cultural differences between China and the States, she is making judgmental comments. Based on her discussion with the Chinese exchange student she hosted on the debatable ownership of Taiwan, she feels like that Chinese are very nationalistic because the host student was “really intent on believing that Taiwan is part of China”. When she talks about the gender difference, she is saying, “In America, everything is so equal... males and females are equal. But in China, I feel like there, you know, very strict gender roles like girls should do these things, boys should do these things. Like boys should be interested like basketball, study; girls should be good at studying, like house-keeping”. When talking about the Chinese people, she feels like “Chinese people are less open with saying what they really feel... or as maybe people on this part [American people] honest or open”, and she would mostly keep the “more American way”, being “more honest, more straightforward. Saying what you think and feel”, which “is better than the Chinese way”.

Indeed, LL has a knowing of Chinese culture relating to the nationalism, the gender difference, and the less open Chinese manner. However, understanding of cultural differences is more than simply knowing of the differences, it is more about going much deeper and digging out the reasons why there exist the differences, then developing a fairly understanding of the differences instead of judgmental viewpoints that may create conflicts in the adaptation process. In another words, the participants need to be open-minded, be flexible and to go with the flow, like Linda La addresses 入乡随俗 although understanding doesn't necessarily mean that you have to accept the differences.

Another participant TN (2nd interview) is approaching the same topic in a different way. He also talks about the nationalism in China, saying “Everyone in this country is like me, we are all groups, or family, none of us are different”, but he explains why Chinese people thought that “everyone in China is the same” because there are “a lot of the ads, like the propaganda, whatever, they always said like China are together, like China are united. And the idea of everyone is working together... in the art museums... there are a lot of arts about people are working together, building things”.

Based on this understanding, he is commenting on both sides, saying “it is good because you imagine yourself all like one organism, or that allows you to do a lot of things, even like make group movements, like if you work together, you can accomplish a lot”; however, for the people who are different, like Jews or gay people in China, “it is very awkward for them...they would want like everyone to know the difference but still accept them, realize we are still all the huge organism but not everyone is exactly the same...if everyone is different and no one is working together, and you can’t accomplish anything...it is really a balance”. This is a fair understanding of cultural differences although he didn’t dig deep enough to the root of the nationalism (to be supported by theories from the Literature review, the collectivism & individualism).

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