

Kun Yan

# Chinese International Students' Stressors and Coping Strategies in the United States

# EDUCATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: ISSUES, CONCERNS AND PROSPECTS

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Volume 37

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Kun Yan

# Chinese International Students' Stressors and Coping Strategies in the United States

 Springer

Kun Yan  
Tsinghua University  
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## Series Editors' Introduction

This book by Kun Yan, *Chinese International Students' Stressors and Coping Strategies in the United States*, is the latest volume to be published in the long-standing Springer book series "Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects." The first book in this Springer series was published in 2002, with this volume by Kun Yan being the 37th volume published to date.

The movement of large numbers of youth between countries to pursue higher education ambitions, by attending overseas universities, has become an important feature of globalization and the mass transfer of people between countries. In fact, those countries that receive large numbers of foreign students not only earn valuable foreign exchange through their involvement with this activity but also have the potential to increase their sphere of influence in the world when students return to their home countries.

This mass movement of students between countries who are seeking to expand their education opportunities through knowledge, skills, and overseas experience often results in stresses and strains for the students involved, as they seek to cope with and adjust to the social and cultural characteristics of their host country, which often may be very different to their country of origin.

This interesting and important book by Kun Yan sheds light on the main areas of stress experienced by Chinese students in the United States and investigates how these students develop and utilize coping mechanisms and strategies to manage that stress. In addition to providing cutting-edge information on the student stress and coping mechanisms for dealing with this, this volume provides very useful and doable suggestions as to what American universities can do to ease the transition of student and help them develop coping mechanisms to deal with their new, foreign environment. The study also provides insights which will help Chinese universities best prepare their students to study overseas.

The findings reported upon in this book are based on original material collected through both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) means. In addition, the results reported upon here should also be useful in better understanding, and gaining insights about, the phenomena studied not just for Chinese students

in American universities, and Chinese students in general, but also other nationalities studying outside their home country.

This volume will be an essential guide for anyone with an interest in better understanding the situation regarding Chinese students studying in America.

The various topics included in this Springer book series on education in the Asia-Pacific region are wide ranging and varied in coverage, with an emphasis on cutting-edge developments, best practices, and education innovations for development. Topics examined include environmental education and education for sustainable development; the reform of primary, secondary, and teacher education; innovative approaches to education assessment; alternative education; most effective ways to achieve quality and highly relevant education for all; active aging through active learning; case studies of education and schooling systems in various countries in the region; cross-country and cross-cultural studies of education and schooling; and the sociology of teachers as an occupational group, to mention just a few. For full details about books published to date in this series, examine the Springer website <http://www.springer.com/series/5888>.

All volumes in this book series aim to meet the interests and priorities of a diverse education audience including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, tertiary students, teachers at all levels within education systems, and members of the public who are interested in better understanding cutting-edge developments in education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

The reason why this book series has been devoted exclusively to examining various aspects of education and schooling in the Asia-Pacific region is that this is a challenging region which is renowned for its size, diversity, and complexity, whether it be geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political, or developmental. Education and schooling in countries throughout the region impact on every aspect of people's lives, including employment, labor force considerations, education and training, cultural orientation, and attitudes and values. Asia-Pacific is home to some 63 % of the world's population of 7 billion. Countries with the largest populations (China, 1.4 billion; India, 1.3 billion) and the most rapidly growing megacities are to be found in the region, as are countries with relatively small populations (Bhutan, 755,000; the island of Niue, 1600).

Levels of economic and sociopolitical development vary widely, with some of the richest countries (such as Japan) and some of the poorest countries on earth (such as Bangladesh). Asia contains the largest number of poor of any region in the world, the incidence of those living below the poverty line remaining as high as 40 percent in some countries in Asia. At the same time, many countries in Asia are experiencing a period of great economic growth and social development. However, inclusive growth remains elusive, as does growth that is sustainable and does not destroy the quality of the environment. The growing prominence of Asian economies and corporations, together with globalization and technological innovation, is leading to long-term changes in trade, business, and labor markets, to the sociology of populations within (and between) countries. There is a rebalancing of power, centered on the Asia-Pacific region, with the Asian Development Bank in Manila declaring that the twenty-first century will be "the Century of Asia Pacific."

We know that this book series makes a useful contribution to knowledge sharing about education and schooling in Asia-Pacific. Any readers of this or other volumes in the series who have an idea for writing their own book (or editing a book) on any aspect of education and/or schooling that is relevant to the region are enthusiastically encouraged to approach the series editors either directly or through Springer to publish their own volume in the series, since we are always willing to assist prospective authors shape their manuscripts in ways that make them suitable for publication in this series.

Doha, Qatar  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
October 2016

Rupert Maclean  
Lorraine Symaco



# Preface

This study examines the sources of stress among Chinese students in the United States. It also investigates how they utilize coping strategies and resources to manage their stress.

A survey was conducted to obtain information about the stress sources, coping strategies, and help-seeking beliefs of contemporary mainland Chinese students in America. A follow-up interview study was conducted to provide additional evidence of these issues. Findings are discussed and analyzed in the context of Berry's conceptual framework of stress and coping for acculturation.

This study reveals that the life of Chinese students in the United States is not easy and they have to endure multifaceted life stresses. Job opportunities, immigration issues, and academic pressure rank the highest among the stressors. Individual variables such as gender, college major, age, marital status, length of stay, and acculturation strategies show significant influences on stress levels among students.

It is also found that Chinese students engage in a wide range of coping strategies to alleviate their stress. When seeking help from others, they primarily turn to their family or other Chinese students. Most of them did not know how the counseling services work or have had a hard time telling counselors about their personal problems. Students identify a lack of common language and understanding of mental health concepts, as well as fear of stigmatization, as limiting their expression of psychological needs and stress.

Based on the findings of this study, suggestions are made to both American university communities and Chinese international students, regarding what must be done to enhance Chinese students' cross-cultural experiences in America. The results of this study can help Chinese students already in the United States and those who plan to come and adapt to the American educational environment. The results may also inform policymakers, administrators, and educators in American universities, helping them to improve the services and programs for their foreign students.

Beijing, China

Kun Yan

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## Editors' Short Biography

**Dr. Kun Yan** is an Associate Professor at Tsinghua University's Institute of Education. Her research areas include higher education, educational psychology, as well as international and comparative education. In the past 5 years, Dr. Yan has published dozens of professional articles in leading international journals, and presented at numerous professional conferences. Due to her distinguished contributions to the research of college student development, Dr. Yan received the Beijing Philosophy and Social Science Research Achievement Award.

Dr. Yan formerly served as Chair for the American Education Research Association (AERA) Session on Stress and Coping in Education (2011), and as Chair for the AERA Session on College Student Professional Development (2013). She has also been invited as a reviewer for several SSCI journals such as the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*.

Prior to joining Tsinghua University, Dr. Yan obtained her Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the Mary Lou Fulton School of Education at Arizona State University in 2008. Her Doctoral Advisor was David C. Berliner, a member of the National Academy of Education (NEA), and a Past President of both the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association (APA). During her doctoral studies, Dr. Yan was selected as the Honors Disciplinary Faculty due to her outstanding performance and contributions to the University.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Statement of the Problem

This study investigates the sources of stress among Chinese international students in the United States. The investigator also studies how they use coping strategies and resources to manage their stress.

The research problem stemmed from my own experience as a student in an American graduate school, a mixture of the excitement of embarking on a new phase of life in a new location and the constant anxiety caused by various adjustment problems. Two years after coming to the United States, I started to reflect on the sources of my stress and my various coping mechanisms. Then I started wondering if other Chinese international students experienced similar stress and anxiety in the United States. With this question in mind, I conducted a preliminary study in the spring of 2007. Twenty Chinese students at a selected university were interviewed. I found that although these students came from different educational and professional backgrounds, had different personal and professional communities while in China and in the United States, majored in different areas and in different departments, and worked with different advisors on different research projects in different disciplines, they still expressed similar feelings toward their lives in the United States. That is, however beneficial their presence is to American higher education or however rewarding an American graduate degree is to their future, the life of Chinese students in the United States is not easy. Just as Zhao (2005) observed, their life in the U.S. “while offering excitements, surprises, joys, and freedom, it also imposes ordeals, confusions and frustration, necessitates searching and adjustment, and demands negotiations and sacrifices due to the multitude of the differences between China and America in cultural and religious belief and in political, social, and educational systems” (p. 30). The differences between China and America create immense adjustment difficulties for Chinese international students. For most students, many of these difficulties were unexpected and students were unprepared for them since these difficulties were very different from the problems they faced at Chinese universities. When they were in China, many of these Chinese students were unable to imagine the magnitude of difficulties they

would eventually encounter in America. They were shocked by both the unexpected nature of the difficulties and their inability to effectively deal with those difficulties.

Facing many difficult situations while pursuing their goals and dreams in the United States, Chinese students may become “too frustrated to maintain the aspirations that had originally motivated them to relocate to the United States” (Situ et al. 1995, p. 137). Facing the new environment, new culture, academic challenges, linguistic barriers, financial pressures, long separation from families, as well as concerns over their visa status, Chinese international students find themselves experiencing a variety of stresses. Many of them are engaged in coping with the stress of daily life. Observing the American experience of Chinese students, Klein et al. (1981) made the following statement:

The young person (Chinese students) who leaves home to study in America is in an ironic position. Ordinarily a quite well-adapted person, with achievement great enough to be eligible for study abroad, he/she moves deliberately into a position of stress and personal vulnerability. (p. 30)

The findings of my preliminary research with Chinese international students suggested a systematic examination should be undertaken in order to delineate what the most stressful aspects of their lives in the United States are, how they characterize their stress, what conditions they believe tend to account for their stress, and how they handle their stress over time. The implications of such findings might be beneficial for Chinese international students, the university administration, and others who try to help these students to live more fulfilling academic and personal lives.

## **Objectives**

This book explores in what ways Chinese international students may suffer stress and how they conceptualize and adapt to stress in the American higher education environment. Specifically, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, it is an attempt to investigate and describe the stressors and adjustment concerns of students from People’s Republic of China who study in the United States. Second, this study seeks to expand an understanding of Chinese students’ beliefs and behaviors regarding coping and help-seeking. It is the aim of this research to contribute to the process of informing and improving services and programs for Chinese international students.

## **Educational Importance of This Study**

This study is significant for a number of reasons. First, the issues addressed in this book concern a significant, if not critical, population. Among the international students who attend American universities, mainland Chinese students constitute

one of the largest groups (Lampton et al. 1986; Orleans 1988; Wan 2001). According to the latest statistics, the United States is the leading destination for Chinese students pursuing overseas studies, and almost one-third of all foreign students in the United States are from China. Chinese students now constitute the highest enrollment, and there were 304,040 students in the United States (Institute of International Education 2015). Today, more than ever before, increasing numbers of mainland Chinese students attend American universities. Such a fast-growing population deserve special attention, and their problems are worthy of being studied.

Secondly, the study targets a stress-ridden population. While being one of most influential foreign student forces on American campuses (Lin 1998), Chinese students, however, are also one of the international groups who experience greater challenges adapting to the American educational system (Yeh 2000). Coming from a country that is fundamentally different in language, culture, social structure, and political ideology and coming from a country that was isolated from the rest of the world for almost quarter of a century, Chinese students' cross-cultural experiences in the United States are almost always likely to be stressful for international students (Klein et al. 1981). Just as Yang and Clum (1994) argued, the more different the two countries are, the more stressful the adjustment is likely to be. Chinese students' coping experiences are likely to be more difficult compared with those students from European countries or even those students from other Asian countries, since China and the United States have been identified as having maximum cultural distance (Samovar and Porter 1991). Furthermore, research has indicated that international students who come from non-European backgrounds, less developed countries, and/or Eastern countries tend to suffer more stress in adjusting to American campus life (Perkins 1977; Lin 1998). China is all three: it is a non-European, developing, and Eastern country; thus, Chinese students may be expected to encounter to a greater extent all the challenges and the difficulties people from any one of these three backgrounds ordinarily encounter. With so many difficulties, Chinese students are expected to experience much more anxiety than other students (Sue and Zane 1985; Yeh 2000). Based on this observation, the current study intentionally chose mainland Chinese students as subjects. This study hopes to add to our understanding about how this special group defines and manages its stress.

The project is important for a third reason. Although studies demonstrated that Chinese students experience more acute distress and stress than other students in the United States (Bourne 1975; Klein et al. 1981; Yang and Clum 1994; Yeh 2000), their stress and their management of that stress, however, have rarely been the subject of a systematic and empirical research. On one hand, general perceptions of mainland Chinese students' educational achievements may make it difficult to perceive their stress and adaptation levels, and thus there is a failure to pay attention to them (Sue and Zane 1985; Yeh 2000). Because grade point average and graduation statistics are generally relied upon as the sole indicators of academic success (Sue and Zane 1985), Chinese students' educational achievements overshadow their adjustment problems and psychological stress. On the other hand, signs of

Chinese students' stress may not be visible to outsiders as their cultural background tends to camouflage this (Chuang 1988). Chinese parents, traditionally, have taught their children to be quiet, to be studious, and not to draw attention to themselves. Furthermore, cultural factors, such as the shame and disgrace associated with admitting to having emotional problems, as well as the handling of problems within the family rather than relying on outside resources, prevent Chinese students from seeking outside help. Therefore, a better understanding of how Chinese international students conceptualize and adapt to stress will bridge this research gap and thus enrich the broad literature on international students' adjustment in foreign countries.

Fourth, this study relates to a practical problem. On a day-to-day basis, how can American institutions maintain higher levels of student satisfaction or contentment? To the extent that a portion of a student body is anxiety ridden, dissatisfied, or disruptive, the campus suffers. Although American universities have kept their doors wide open and encouraged Chinese students to come, not all educational institutions are prepared to satisfy the special needs of these students (Lin 1998). It is the aim of this research to contribute to the process of informing and improving services and programs for Chinese international students.

Finally, the design of this study itself includes some unique features. For most of the previous studies on cross-cultural adjustment, researchers have used quantitative methods as the major method of investigations. The weakness of such designs is that researchers often fail to further explore their quantitative findings. To alleviate such limitations, I add qualitative study as a follow-up procedure to examine the quantitative findings in more detail and find out more about participants' individual experiences. The application of this mixed-method approach makes the findings of my study more valid.

## Definitions

1. Chinese students: Those students who are from mainland China with a valid nonimmigrant student status authorization.
2. Acculturation: A change as a result of continuous, firsthand contact between two distinct cultural groups. Acculturation was originally understood to be a group experience but is now recognized also as an individual-level phenomenon (Berry 1997).
3. Stress: Cognitive and psychological reactions to a series of challenges not only from academic study and language adjustment but also very diverse social conditions. Stress reactions include feelings of deprivation, loss, rejection, confusion, surprise, anxiety, and impotency (Oberg 1960). It is natural for Chinese students to feel anxious and strained when they are aware of the cultural differences and the need to make the effort to adapt to unfamiliar environments. They also have feelings of impotence or powerlessness on many occasions (in situations of linguistic and academic adjustment, cultural

deficiency and social isolation, financial burden, visa, job, and immigration concerns) due to their perceived inability to cope with the new environment. Confusion in roles, expectations, and values is also expected when losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Students feel estrangement, and social isolation is accordingly developed when they are unable to understand, control, or predict the behavior of those around them.

4. Stressors (sources of stress): Any cultural, social, financial, linguistic, or academic factors which account for Chinese students' stress.
5. Coping: Has been defined as an attempt to master or manage any stressful, threatening, and frustrating situation and to adapt to difficult conditions (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).
6. Coping strategies: Any strategies used by Chinese students attempting to alleviate problems, challenges, and stress in the United States.
7. Academic pressure: Stress resulting from Chinese students' academic courses and research.
8. Financial pressure: Stress resulting from Chinese students' financial conditions in the United States.
9. Sociocultural pressure: Stress resulting from social interaction with host nationals or from the inability to understand or accept the customs, values, behaviors, and systems in the United States.
10. Visa, immigration, and job pressure: Stress resulting from visa status, immigration concerns, or the problems of job hunting in the United States.
11. Linguistic pressure: Stress resulting from linguistic difficulties in speaking, writing, listening, and understanding English.

## Chapter 2

# Chinese International Students in the United States: Demographic Trends, Motivations, and Acculturation Features

This chapter addresses the unique features of Chinese international students in the United States in three dimensions. The first part includes the literature pertinent to the history and demographic information of Chinese international students in American higher education. In the second part, the review turns to the literature concerning what factors drive Chinese students to study abroad. The third part mainly discusses Chinese students' acculturation features in terms of group-level factors such as culture, social life, and employment and immigration issues. In the next chapter, the discussion moves on to the special challenges Chinese students face while studying in the United States. In doing so, these two chapters synthesize the literature which provides a stage setting for this study.

## The History and Demographics of Chinese International Students

### *Chinese International Students in the United States: 1890–1950*

The Chinese government (*Qing* Imperial government, 1644–1911) sent the first group of 120 students to the United States from 1872 to 1875. The main stream of Chinese students came after China's defeat by Japan in 1895 and the failure of the Boxer Rebellion in 1899 (Wang 1965). Through 1951, about 36,000 Chinese students had studied in the United States (Dow 1975). From the very beginning, the Chinese government had political expectations associated with sending students abroad. Sending students abroad was considered the natural way to face the Western challenge. Students left China with the special mission that linked their studies to the cause of national salvation. Almost all of early students in the United

States were sent and supported by the government, and most of them were in the natural science and other technically oriented subjects. They were often quite young and many were not prepared for their studies in a foreign culture (Su 1942).

In terms of the goals of foreign study, the *Qing* government's attitude was conservative and technically oriented. As illustrated by Li Hung-Chang, the Minister of the *Qing* Imperial government from 1870 to 1895, the goal of the foreign study was for these students "to learn about the sciences related to army, navy, mathematics, engineering, etc., for ten-odd years, so that after they have completed their study and returned to China all the technological specialties of the West may be adopted in China, and the nation may begin to grow strong by its own efforts" (Wang 1965, p. 78). In addition, the *Qing* government was concerned that young people exposed to American society would lose their own cultural identity. As a result of such concern, Chinese learning as substance and Western learning as functional had become the accepted slogan since the late 1890s (Wang 1992).

After the *Qing* Imperial government was overthrown in 1911, self-supported students from rich families increasingly became the kind of students who studied abroad. The noble goals of foreign study gradually yielded to personal interests (Wang 1965). The dream of saving China through foreign studies was discredited after 1925 (Wang 1965). By 1930, the motivation to go abroad had totally switched to personal factors, and a foreign education had become the rich men's interest (Chen 1979). While abroad, students' main interest became obtaining the US diploma, the symbol of prestige. In the study of overseas Chinese student history, Bourne (1975) reported, "an American degree was a guarantee of ascent in the social and political structure of China (in the early 20th century)" (p. 269).

### ***Chinese International Students in the United States: After 1978***

From 1949 until the end of Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), China was isolated from the rest of the world and foreign study was highly restricted. Since the late 1970s, however, vast political and economic changes have taken place in China. After nearly half a century of isolation, the post-Mao government abandoned the class struggle approach adopted during the Cultural Revolution to development that favored economic growth through scientific knowledge.

The government of the People's Republic of China aggressively promoted modernization through international scholarly and technological exchanges. This policy directly increased the United States-China educational exchange (Lampton et al. 1986). In 1978, when Mr. Frank Press, the science and technology advisor for President Jimmy Carter, visited China, the two countries agreed to exchange students and scholars. About 50 Chinese students were then enrolled at several elite American universities. After that, the number of students coming to the United States soared. The number of mainland Chinese students in the United States

increased from nearly zero at the beginning of 1978 to a total of approximately 20,030 by 1988. This figure doubled by 1993 and tripled by 2003 (Institute of International Education 2015). The proportion of foreign students in the United States who are from China increased more than sixfold over the last fifteen years from 1997 to 2013 (Newman 2014). According to the latest statistics, the United States is the leading destination for Chinese students pursuing overseas studies, and almost one-third of all foreign students in the United States are from China. Chinese students now constitute the highest enrollment, and there were 304,040 students in the United States (Institute of International Education 2015). In terms of the specific rank among the international students in United States, China surpassed Taiwan in 1989 as the country sending the largest number of students to the United States. From 1995 to 1998, China dropped to the number two sending country after Japan. In 1998–1999, China became the leading sender again for 3 years, through 2000–2001. In 2001–2002, India replaced China and became the top sender of students to the United States and retained that position for 8 years. In 2009–2010, China surpassed traditional “study abroad” heavyweights like India and South Korea, to lead international enrollment across US higher education, and retained the top place for 4 years. In 2013, Chinese student enrollments increased by 21 % in total to almost 235,597. Students from China represent 29 % of total number of international students in the United States. While the majority of Chinese students study at the graduate level, the United States continues to experience an upsurge in the number of undergraduate students coming from China. Total undergraduate students from China jumped 257 % between 2009 and 2013. Identifying the academic level that students pursued during 2012–2013, the Open Doors reports that Chinese students constitute the highest enrollment, with 43.9 % at graduate program. Thirty-nine percent attended Baccalaureate I and II institutions, 6.1 % were at other types of institutions, and 10.2 % were obtaining their Optional Practical Training (OPT) (Institute of International Education 2013).

Following the traditional pattern, contemporary Chinese students in the United States are still concentrated in the natural sciences, engineering, computer programming, biochemistry, and other technology-oriented subjects (Frank 2000). In recent years, however, the enrollment of Chinese students has significantly increased in disciplines such as business and management, social sciences, liberal arts, humanities, education, communications, and library science (Zhao 2005). Since 2010, business and management has surpassed the so-called STEM field for 3 years as the most popular academic discipline for Chinese international students in America (Institute of International Education 1981–2013).

In terms of the composition, contemporary Chinese students can be divided into two subgroups: exceptionally capable students with strong academic backgrounds and exceptionally rich students with poor grades (Luan 2012). The former group of students get into elite Chinese universities due to their good grades. They choose to pursue a graduate degree abroad and get selected by American institutions based on their high academic records. In contrast, the latter, with high financial resources but low academic preparedness, typically bypass the national entrance exam with the very clear intention that they have the financial resources to directly go abroad to



study. Most of them are unable to test into a Chinese university, and their parents pay their way into a mediocre university in usually the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States (Luan 2012). Besides these two extremes, the middle group is taking interest in studying overseas.

There is a growing middle class in China. They live in the cities, with a lot of knowledge and a certain level of education background. They value the importance of education and are willing to invest in the children by sending them abroad. They are seeking a higher quality of education, and they see that the world's top-ranked universities are in the United States. Many students in this group flock to the elite US universities. In contrast to those who go abroad when they fail to secure a place at a local Chinese university, these group of students are the best test-takers with strong academic background. They usually forgo elite Chinese universities to study in the United States (Lai 2012; Narow 2011).

Lai (2012) analyzed the trends of Chinese international students and pointed out two generations have emerged since the late 1970s. China's economic reforms and "opening-up" that began in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping gave rise to the first major generation of students, who were generally reliant on scholarships to study in the United States. Coinciding with China's rapid economic growth, a distinctive second generation emerged in the early 2000s comprising much more affluent students. They don't rely on scholarships anymore. Narow (2011) argued that the increasing number of affluent Chinese has played a significant role in the increasing number of students studying in the United States. This argument was supported by the most recent figures of World Education Service (Chang et al. 2014). The US-based institute's study sorts the types of international students into four categories: explorers, highfliers, strivers, as well as strugglers based on students' academic preparedness and financial resources. Chinese students were identified as more likely to be "explorers" (students with high financial resources but low academic preparedness) or "highfliers" (students with high financial resources and high academic preparedness). "Explorers" and "highfliers" constitute over 70 % of the total Chinese international students represented in their study (Chang et al. 2014).

Jiang (2012) viewed the rising generation of affluent students as China's third wave of those studying abroad. According to him, the booming economy meant Chinese families could afford to send their child abroad and so began this third wave of students coming from China. Jiang also pointed out these students lack the cultural loyalty and patriotism of China's first wave (students from 1890 to 1950) and the academic merit and diligence of the second wave (Chinese graduate students from early 1980s till late 1999s) (Jiang 2012) (Table 2.1).

In terms of the goals and outcomes of the foreign study movement, history seems to be repeating itself. Similar to the foreign study movement prior to 1949, students' personal economic and academic motivations gradually overshadow the government's unrealistic ideals. The Chinese government's lofty ideals face a gloomy reality. Just as Wang (1992) argued, "after a brief initial period of enthusiasm, coordination between the government and the students has disappeared and the government has lost control over a movement initially designed to foster economic growth and national restoration" (p. 90). Government-supported visiting scholars

**Table 2.1** Number of Chinese students in American institutions

Year	Number of students	Rank
2015	304,040	1
2014	274,000	1
2013	235,597	1
2012	194,029	1
2011	157,588	1
2010	127,628	1
2009	98,235	2
2008	81,127	2
2007	67,723	2
2006	62,582	2
2005	62,523	2
2004	64,757	2
2003	63,211	2
2002	59,939	2
2001	54,466	1
2000	51,001	1
1999	46,958	2
1998	42,503	2
1997	39,613	2
1996	39,403	2
1995	44,381	1
1994	45,130	1
1993	42,940	1
1992	39,600	1
1991	33,390	1
1990	29,040	1
1989	25,170	2
1988	20,030	3
1987	13,980	5
1986	10,100	11
1985	8140	12
1984	6230	16
1983	4350	18
1982	2770	27
1981	Below 1000	Below 50

Note. Open doors 1980/1981–2014/2015 (Numbers do not include visiting scholars doing research in American institutions)

have been gradually substituted by self-supported students. The turning point occurred at the end of 1984, when the State Council of China stipulated that anyone who had been admitted by a foreign institution and had received foreign financial support or any other kind of assistantship was eligible for applying to go abroad self-funded (Lin 1998). Since then, the number of nongovernment-sponsored Chinese students has rapidly increased and now represents a large majority of the

Chinese students on American campuses (Huang 1997). Financially, they seek financial aid in the United States instead of relying on the Chinese government. As revealed by Orleans (1988), in 1979, the Chinese government provided 54% of the funding, while in 1985 only 17 % of funding came from the Chinese government. The share of funding by American universities increased from 18% to 57% over this time period. Academically, there is an ever increasing number of Chinese students who are in degree-seeking programs as opposed to the number of visiting scholars. The percentage of visiting scholars to the United States dropped dramatically, from 47 % in 1979 to 31% in 1985 (Orleans 1988). With students' increasing disenchantment with government policies, the original goal of sending students abroad to bring back valuable Western technology to help modernize China has diminished.

The contemporary Chinese foreign study movement has not only followed the old patterns but it has also demonstrated some new trends. There is a striking difference between the contemporary movement and the one in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The contemporary students are more dubious about ever returning home and have a greater willingness to leave permanently. In the early periods, foreign study was home centered. On one hand, most American-educated Chinese returned to China after finishing their studies in the United States and were highly relied upon to provide service in higher educational institutions and the government (Meng 1931). Furthermore, most Chinese students in America had very limited interaction with American life while they were abroad. Most knew they would return home in the end, so their motivation to assimilate or participate in Western life was very limited (Chen 1979). In contrast to the earlier period, contemporary foreign study features a low rate of return to China. The rate has decreased sharply since the mid-1980s (Orleans 1988). Of about 80,000 students and visiting scholars who came to the United States between 1979 and 1989, only about 26,000 returned, most of them before 1986 (Orleans 1988). Major reasons accounting for contemporary Chinese students' non-return were obviously the same as what had pulled them here: better living and working conditions, higher salaries, better research facilities, greater career development opportunities, and personal freedom. Apart from these factors, estrangement toward the home country, as revealed by Cao's study (Cao 1997), was also one of the important factors which contributed to the students' willingness to remain in America. The feeling of estrangement appeared to be the product of changes in both the Chinese students and the home environment. On one hand, having been exposed to the customs and lifestyle in the United States over a period of years, they faced countercultural shock when they went back home even for short visits. On the other hand, there were undoubtedly rapid changes in Chinese social and moral in recent years which went beyond their expectation. Compared to the older generation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth who were more inclined to return, the contemporary generation has less attachment to home. The "brain drain" phenomena became increasingly severe during the contemporary foreign study movement (Wang 1992).

Another significant difference between the contemporary generation of Chinese students studying abroad and those prior to 1949 is in their academic quality. Contemporary students' academic quality and dedications to science surpass that of the older generations. Most contemporary Chinese students in America entered universities or colleges in China in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. They represent the cream of Chinese higher education after the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, the selection process of students was made by US universities rather than by Qing Imperial government or by wealth (after 1925). This shift means that the current students' qualifications are based on their academic records and are likely to be higher than those of the nineteenth century or the early twentieth century (Wang 1992).

## **Chinese Students' Motivation to Study Abroad**

Once China opened its door to the rest of the world, the positive images of the West held before 1949 have returned with fast speed. With more contact with the West after 1979, the negative depiction of the West as Western imperialists before and during the Cultural Revolution quickly evaporated and was replaced with positive images, especially among the educated. The glorifying remarks about the West's advancement and regretful emotion about China's backwardness were pervasive in both the public media and private discussion. With increasing complaints about conditions at home and highly idealized descriptions of the outside world, China became caught in a fever of going abroad (Chen 1988). Wang (1992) pointed out the fad of studying abroad is strongly "push oriented." According to him, individuals face little choice when the images of America are nourished by conditions of poverty at home. On one hand, they are frustrated by the insufficient opportunities to realize their potential in China, and on the other hand, they are pushed to study abroad by the "zealous valorization of American culture, education, and technology" (Zhao 2005).

The empirical study by Brzezinski (1994) explored the underlying reasons which drive Chinese students to study abroad. Based on his findings, the attraction of studying in the United States was expressed by Chinese students in terms of gaining prestige, an intrinsic-personal attraction, and as a way to get into a system perceived as more fair. Their motives were highly instrumental.

Brzezinski argued that for Chinese students, Chinese society seems to attribute a form of cultural capital to intellectuals with an experience abroad. Western know-how apparently provides better access to promotions and to certain positions. In Chinese students' eyes, the Chinese society in general and the Chinese manpower system of promotions in particular encourage students to study abroad. The diploma, for instance, earned in Western-developed countries, such as the United States, is a glorious emblem of prestige, one deemed superior to the equivalent degree earned at home. In order to obtain meaningful positions and possible promotions in Chinese intellectual circles, Chinese students believe that they cannot

afford to be without the cultural capital attributed to a study abroad experience (Brzezinski 1994). In the minds of Chinese students, status and societal respect as it related to educational achievement and prestige shifted from a Chinese university education to foreign education. If one desires to have a respected position within the Chinese intellectual community, Western knowledge and an experience abroad are essential for maximizing one's potential.

The attraction of studying abroad was also viewed as a way to get into a system which was perceived as more fair, according to Brzezinski. Politically, the network system and manpower policies in China are specific forms of political constraint influencing Chinese students' decision to study abroad. Chinese students view the American and Chinese system as diametric opposites. They believe personal goals can be best met via the merit-based system in the United States, one that they view as being primarily based on competition. This was contrasted with self-directed goals being met through relationships in their homeland. Since students felt they could get trapped in an occupation and because family and personal network is more important than merit, the system was resented. Based on the empirical findings, Brzezinski (1994) concluded that political constraint and internal, cultural-personal factors worked together to propel students abroad.

Besides the factors mentioned by Brzezinski (1994), some emerging factors driving mainland Chinese to study in the United States came into play during the late 2000s and early 2010s. The stream of students leaving the country represents an effort by China to facilitate the education of students that their institutions don't have the capacity to enroll. College-age individuals in higher education increased from 1.4 % in 1978 to more than 20 % in the twenty-first century in China (Schuster 2013). The prestige of US institutions provides significant appeal especially when Chinese universities could not meet the domestic demand. Total undergraduate students from China jumped 257 % between 2009 and 2013 in the United States (Institute of International Education 2013). Chinese students are slightly overrepresented at American colleges in terms of global population ratios. College-age Chinese adults make up about 20 % of all college-age adults in the world (outside of the United States), but represent almost 30 % of all foreign students in the United States (Newman 2014).

Foreign study movements also reflect the bleak job market in China and the force of globalization across the world. Chinese students are seeking American credentials primarily to expand their career opportunities. On the one hand, facing the ever-increasing unemployment rate among college graduates, Chinese students are increasingly aware that obtaining a basic university diploma no longer guarantees decent jobs and good incomes (Lin 2010). A foreign degree can therefore be helpful for individuals who are anxious to differentiate themselves. They expect that a degree from a prestigious college in the United States will give them an edge over others in searching for a job. On the other hand, globalization is driving this increasing number of students who go abroad, because studying abroad will give them the opportunity to be educated for a global marketplace. A US education offers students a global perspective and different experiences, where soft skills vital to the global business world such as leadership, decision-making, and working in

teams are emphasized and are often lacking in a Chinese university's curriculum. The international exposure and the skills that they have acquired while studying abroad give students an advantage in terms of compensations and promotions (Luan 2012).

In addition to the factors mentioned above, social and peer pressure is found to be another significant factor propelling Chinese students for overseas study (Li 1993; Cao 1997). According to a qualitative study conducted at Columbia University, 14 mainland Chinese students mentioned that they were influenced by friends and relatives who had already gone abroad or they felt pressure in their work units because of the departure of their colleagues (Cao 1997).

## **Chinese Students' Group-Level Acculturation Features in America**

According to Berry's acculturation framework (Berry 1997), group-level acculturation means that migrant (sojourner) groups usually change substantially as a result of living with two sets of cultural influences. These macro-level changes include economic changes, social changes, culture changes, language shifts, religious conversions, and value systems. This section discusses Chinese students' acculturation features in terms of group-level factors such as culture, social life, and employment and immigration issues.

### ***Culture and Ethnic Relations in America***

Berry (1997) argued that the acculturation process is influenced by both societal and individual variables. The discriminating features of the receiving society such as ethnic composition, extent of cultural pluralism, and salient attitudes toward ethnic and cultural out-groups are particularly important. Thus, it is necessary to provide a brief picture about the culture relations in America before discussing Chinese students' group-level acculturation features.

America has characteristics of a "world." America is an ideal laboratory of modern cultural relations "given its lack of a centralizing cultural tradition, its acceptance of humanistic ideas such as freedom and democracy, its obsession with technology, and nationalism based on pride in these ideas and on economic power" (Wang 1992, p. 24). The culture and ethnic relations in a modern society characterized by rapid acculturation and group identity disintegration hold true for America.

On one hand, assimilation in America is increasingly an ideal rather than a reality. Structural assimilation, the entrance of immigrants into primary group relations with the dominant people, for example, has rarely occurred in American

society (Gordon 1964). The transition from “melting pot ideals” to the acceptance of cultural pluralism, “mixed salad ideals,” reflects changing American cultural relations as a result of modernization in American society in the past two centuries (Archdeacon 1984)

On the other hand, American society has become increasingly homogeneous in terms of behavior and lifestyle. America excels in its power of acculturation. Forces of acculturation, represented by technology and a highly interdependent industrial lifestyle, are omnipresent and overwhelming; few can escape from them (Wang 1992).

Taken together, cultural interaction in America changes the behavior and lifestyle, but not the ethnic identity or ideology of different ethnic groups or social classes. Not surprisingly, acculturation in America is largely an individual effort; it is perceived as a choice made by the individual rather than a change forced by the society (Handlin 1951). The individual takes the risks and reaps the benefits of the change.

## *Chinese Students’ Group-Level Acculturation Features*

### **Culture Features**

Most Chinese students’ cross-cultural experiences have been one of confusion, uncertainty, and hastened adjustment. Marginal syndrome characterized most Chinese abroad and many of them are caught between their Chinese root and Western ideas. While expressing enthusiasm about Western ideas, real Western life is strange and alienating, and most Chinese students abroad cling to their native roots and demonstrate sojourner mentalities (Wang 1992). On the other hand, while longing for the native land and family culture, after years of study in the United States, students develop a special and deep feeling toward America and the brain drain phenomena has become an increasingly severe result of the contemporary foreign study movement (Xu 2006).

Culturally, sociocultural challenge in America is real and unavoidable, most Chinese students are caught in a deep dilemma of needing to change, and while at the same time, they are unable or unwilling to change. Most Chinese students’ responses to the American sociocultural challenge have been at a higher level of assimilation for their extrinsic cultural traits such as overt behaviors, dress, manners, lifestyle, and English language skills than for their intrinsic cultural traits including religious beliefs, ethnic values, and cultural heritage. They present an Americanized exterior while maintaining a Chinese interior.

Most of them end up ambiguous in their cultural existence, vacillating between Chinese culture and American culture, identifying with neither, nor, for that matter, being accepted by either. In most cases, their sense of cultural identity is substituted by scientific and economic pursuits. Little cultural reflection is conducted, as most students are more concerned about their personal survival (Wang 1992).

## **Social Features**

America is strange and alien to most Chinese students. The strangeness of American life is either due to the short length of their experience in America or due to the enormous difference between the two cultures. High admiration of the West is mostly based on an affinity of Western science and humanitarian ideas, not real cultural participation and religious encounters (Wang 1992). Chinese students are strongly attached to China in social, cultural, and patriotic terms, and there is no change in identity while in America. Strong ties to home combined with a lack of knowledge about America leads to the severe social isolation (Xu 2006).

On one hand, Chinese students' social interactions with American people tend to be limited. Most of them are socially isolated from Americans and immerse themselves in abstract technical learning (Chen 1979). On the other hand, most of them are structurally or socially segregated on a voluntary basis. They speak Mandarin Chinese and associate primarily with fellow Chinese students or those of similar socioeconomic status in their ethnic community (Tsai 1986). As a result, Chinese students inevitably are caught in a deep spiritual conflict between the professional world which is Western and Americanized and the private world which is related to Oriental and Chinese (Yeh 2000).

Student communities or Chinese associations in the United States are loosely organized and mainly engaged in academic matters, their work dependent on American academic atmosphere and research facilities, with very little organized communication with Chinese associations in China (Zhao 2005).

## **Employment and Immigration**

Uncertainty about their future employment opportunities and immigration status is prevalent among the Chinese student population in the United States. Students' strong sense of uncertainty results partly from their uncertain employment future and immigration status in the United States. After 9/11, the American job market is not promising because of the nation's economic slump. No matter how capable a person is, without a green card, prospective employees find it difficult to land an interview (Xu 2006). In addition to the bleak job market, their uncertainty is enhanced by the instability of American immigration law. American immigrant policy is known for its ambivalence and unpredictability (Yeh 2000). Changes in immigration policy have been frequent and unpredictable. For instance, on June 13, 2007, the Department of State announced that starting July 2007, all employment-based categories for immigrant visas will be "current," meaning that US businesses going through the lengthy and backlogged immigrant visa or "green card" process can, throughout July, file adjustment of status applications. However, only 20 days later, on July 02, 2007, the Department of State revised its July Visa Bulletin published on June 13 and rejected all the applications (Visa Bulletin 2007).



Facing this type of unpredictable policy, most Chinese students realize that immigration is not impossible, it is difficult.

On the other hand, the changing Chinese economy and Chinese peoples' attitudes toward returning students make them gradually less favorable in the Chinese job market. According to Xu (2006), the depreciation of returning students has been caused by a combination of three factors: (1) the steep rise in the number of returnees as the Chinese economy has boomed in recent years, (2) the growth of homebred talent, and 3) the returning students' unreasonably high expectations and lack of working experiences. As a result, a strong sense of uncertainty characterized most Chinese students regarding the prospects of returning to China.

In terms of stay or return, in addition to employment and immigration consideration, sociocultural factors are taken into consideration in making final decisions. Due to their strong roots in China, to cultural alienation in America, and to the recency of their American experience, return expectations in the short term are low, while long-term intentions of staying in America are not high.

## Chapter 3

# Chinese International Students in the United States: Adjustment Problems and Coping Behaviors

In this chapter, the review turns to the literature concerning how Chinese students adapt to American higher institutions. Special challenges Chinese students face while studying in the United States will be discussed. Additionally, their beliefs and behaviors regarding coping and psychological help-seeking will also be reviewed. Lastly, Berry's conceptual framework for stress-coping will be presented.

### Chinese Students' Adjustment Issues

International students of different countries of origin experienced different adjustment problems in the United States, in spite of some common difficulties. Perkins (1977) cautioned researchers to pay more attention to the adjustment problems peculiar to their own (international student) group.

Culha (1974) investigated the needs and concerns of international students at the University of Minnesota. Significant variations were found between Canadian, European, and Chinese student groups in terms of the opportunity to become familiar with American culture and having American friends. Those students who were least likely to have a satisfactory involvement with American culture and making American friends were the Chinese group.

In a comparative study, Perkins (1977) found the peculiar problems for Chinese international students are English proficiency and dealing with racial or religious discrimination, homesickness, separation from family in the home country, and unfriendliness of people from the community, which hinder their adjustment to American culture.

Yao (1983) found that in general Chinese students had problems in many areas, including financial difficulties, adjustment to language, schooling, lifestyle, value system, limited career choices and employment prospects because of their language

barriers, parental high expectations for their education and their return to the family, mate selection, and visa change to live permanently in the United States.

Sue and Zane (1985) compared American-born Chinese students, American students, and Chinese international students. They reported that Chinese international students had the most social and emotional difficulties and faced significant social and academic hardships, although they achieved good academic performance.

In a study conducted at the University of Memphis, Feng (1991) reported that the problems particular to Chinese students are financial problems, poor language skills and academic concerns, cultural differences, and social isolation.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Xia (1992) investigated and compared the adjustment problems from a sample of 215 Asian students from eight different countries or territories. According to Xia's findings, the challenges identified by students from the PRC are English language barriers, financial aid, and religious service areas.

Henderson et al. (1993) found most Chinese students in their study isolated from the campus community: they had few non-Chinese friends, used campus facilities much less, and felt unsafe and discriminated against.

Timm and Wang (1995) examined how Chinese students participated in classroom discussions and interacted with Americans including their instructors and classmates. The study found that although a large percent (75%) of Chinese students reported that they had social contact with Americans outside of the classrooms, about half of them regarded these experiences as negative. The survey also showed that Chinese students had very limited interaction with their instructors and classmates in classrooms. Chinese students attributed their lack of interactions with Americans to a number of reasons that include feeling uncomfortable interacting with Americans, being busy, lack of interests, language barriers, and the convenience of many other Chinese nationals being around.

Sun and Chen (1997) argued the dimensions of difficulties mainland Chinese students' encountered in the United States can be categorized as deficiencies of language and culture.

Zhang and Rentz (1994) pointed out international students from the PRC may face particular adjustment challenges, which are different from those experienced by other Asian students. According to Zhang and Rentz, several factors have contributed to the Chinese students' adjustment problems: (1) financial problems, (2) a lack of understanding or knowledge of modern American society, (3) the influence of the Chinese educational system, (4) growing up amid an officially sanctioned negative characterization of the United States, and (5) decision-making styles that emphasize the family rather than the individual.

Surveying the extant literature, two general themes concerning Chinese students' adjustment problems were identified: they are academic adjustment problems and sociocultural adjustment problems.

## ***Academic Challenges***

### **Language Barrier**

Chinese students' difficulties with English are identified and discussed in a number of research studies (Kao 1987; Lou 1989; Chang 1990; Ye 1992; Yeh 2000; Wan 2001). Empirical studies agreed that language proficiency is the major source of stress and resulted in much frustration for students from China at American universities and colleges (Perkins 1977; Lin 1998; Sun and Chen 1997; Wan 2001). Kao (1987), for instance, studied the problems of Chinese students who attended universities in the Washington, DC area. The findings revealed that Chinese students viewed the English language as the major obstacle to their academic success. At the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Chinese students' academic experience revealed that they have difficulties in academic writing (Ye 1992). When dealing with the image of Chinese students as well adjusted and high achieving, Donovan (1981) pointed out that this image is clouded by limited English proficiency and social adjustment which characterized many of the students from China. Li (1993) concluded that language-related problems were common among Chinese international students, since a vast majority of them did not have an English-speaking environment when they were in China, and it was the first time for most of them to sit in a classroom where the lecture was delivered in English with a targeted audience of English speakers.

In the investigation of 268 Chinese students who studied in ten upper Midwest universities in the United States, Lou (1989) indicated that language problems were considered as the major adjustment problems. Lou further noted:

Oral English appears to be the most difficult problem for Chinese students. Speaking English and making oral reports in class have the highest problematic ratings among the English and communication problems. Writing papers and limited English vocabulary are also rated high by Chinese students. Reading text/materials does not appear to be a problem for Chinese students. (p. 22)

In terms of factors accounting for language difficulties of Chinese students, Wang (2003) suggested, from the point view of Chinese students, that there are four factors associated with their language barrier. They are the following:

1. The influence of Chinese language. "Chinglish" expressions are frequently used.
2. Lack of contextual knowledge or cultural background.
3. Lack of language training. The language training most Chinese students once received often fails to adequately help them to meet the academic demands of their programs.
4. Lack of chance to practice English. Many of Chinese students chose to hang out with other Chinese fellows instead of host nationals, which further hinder their language improvement.

Wang's study (Wang 2003) revealed that while Chinese students struggle with English to succeed in their academic study in the United States, they have found ways to deal with various situations. Sometimes they solve their problems on their own, such as practicing more to develop their language skills or changing to majors where language demands are relatively low. Sometimes they ask for repetition. Sometimes they ignore or act reticent. Sometimes they smile, pretending they understand. From a communication perspective, Lu (2002) identified circumlocution, confirmation check, approximation, clarification request, and appeal for assistance as effective communication strategies for Chinese students to deal with their language difficulties.

### **Incongruities in the Educational System Between China and the United States**

Besides language barrier, Chinese students have experienced some other difficulties while studying in American universities. Several academically related problems can be traced to the differences between the educational systems of China and the United States. Since all of Chinese students were the product of the Chinese educational system, they inevitably had to adjust to the new systems as they began their graduate education in the United States.

In a survey conducted by Perkins (1977), Chinese students perceived "inadequacy of educational preparation" as a more important problem than did students from India. Donovan (1981) elaborated on the "educational shock" experienced by Chinese students. He stated:

P.R.C. students tend to assume that American education is basically like their own. Students from China regularly interpret what they see and hear in the United States in terms familiar to them. This leads the Chinese to expect people and institutions to act in ways that would never occur to many Americans. For example, the central government of China plays a major and direct role in the placement and supervision of all foreign students in the P.R.C. and in the administration of all colleges and universities. It is difficult for Chinese nationals to understand the highly decentralized and autonomous nature of American education. Similarly, schools in China provide a number of services and enforce a number of provisions that have no counterpart in this country. It is natural for Chinese students to assume that the school will provide housing and will specify precisely what courses to be taken-because this is what happened in China. Academic institutions play a very different role in China than they do in the United States, and much of what is done by Chinese institutions is left to the initiative and imagination of the individual in the United States (p. 2).

Empirical findings supported Donovan's arguments. In the study at University of Pittsburg, Lin (1998) reported that Chinese international students found the "rules" governing their academic experience in America were considerably different to those evident in their previous academic environment in China. Holmes (2004) also observed that Chinese MBA students in business school were unprepared for the

interactive nature of classroom communication and had problems interacting in a western academic setting.

## ***Sociocultural Problems***

### **Cultural Shock and Social Isolation**

The push-oriented nature based on the economic hardships at home combined with the lack of knowledge about America means that cultural shock is enormous (Wang 1992). To most Chinese international students, America is strange and alien. Hence, social isolation is severe (Liu 1984).

Extreme cultural distance lies between China and the United States. Cultural distance can be defined as the similarities and differences between the cultural of origin and the culture of contact (Ward 1996). The greater the difference between the two cultures is, the greater the cultural distance. Samovar and Porter (1991) noted there are maximum sociocultural differences between Western and Asian countries, and they cite the United States and China as an example of maximum cultural distance. Empirical research has suggested that there is a robust relationship between the degree of cultural distance and the degree of psychosocial distress experienced in cross-cultural transition (Ward 1996).

Sue and Kirk's (1973) quantitative study compared two ethnic group students in terms of their acculturation process on three measures and reported that Chinese students were more conservative in the sense of obedience and conformance to authority, more inhibited and conventional, less socially extroverted, less ready to express their impulses, and less socially concerned with other people. The study concluded that Chinese students had more difficulties in their adaptation and adjustment to American culture and campus life due to their cultural backgrounds, traditions, and family influence.

Henderson et al. (1993) theoretical-based research analyzed Chinese students' cultural shock at American universities. They pointed out that strong dependence on family, racial/ethnic discrimination, a different educational system, and "the shame culture" of Chinese people all contributed to the cultural shock of Chinese students and caused them to feel out of place and powerless in the new environment.

Graham's (1983) comparative study measured the relative degree of acculturative stress among students from nine cultural groups. The quantitative findings revealed significant differences across groups of students in assimilation patterns, affective contingencies, points of conflict, and cultural stereotyping. Findings also showed that Chinese students felt the most exclusion. Graham attributed the reason for Chinese students' social isolation to the traditional Confucian emphasis on scholarly achievement, such as hard work and a task-oriented ethic and high parental expectations, which alienated them from more fun-oriented and individualistic American students.

## Financial Limitations

Financial concerns are a continuing severe problem for mainland Chinese students, especially for those who rely on the scholarship or financial aid in the United States (Feng 1991; Kao 1987; Ye 1992; Cao 1997). For them, lack of financial aid or inadequate financial resources is most often cited as one of the top ranking problems (Han 1975; Wan 2001). Situ et al. (1995) summed up Chinese students' financial difficulties as follows:

The financial situation may be particularly difficult for students from China, where the people live with relatively low annual incomes and face a very high monetary exchange from Chinese currency into U.S. dollars. . . funding usually comes from either university assistantships or from support from relatives (families). . . Whereas the assistantship generally pays for tuition and provides a small stipend, support from relatives is typically meager and unstable. This situation, also familiar to many American students, simply means that a part-time job must be sought. However, United States immigration regulations do not permit international students to seek off-campus employment. (p. 134)

In addition, most of the student loan programs at the college level available to American students are not available to international students. In a study conducted at Bradley University, Wan (2001) found that Chinese students are somewhat dissatisfied that financial support mechanisms available to American students often are not as applicable or as available to Chinese students.

Yao (1983) reported that, due to limited financial resources, many Chinese students live a modest life. They often fail to purchase adequate health and automobile insurance. Consequently, they may find themselves in desperate situations in the event of an illness or accident. Feng (1991) also argued that financial difficulty is closely related to and has an impact on other areas such as participation in social activities, academic achievement, social integration, and English language skills. Due to financial burdens, Chinese students show little interest in participating in social activities. They cannot afford expensive lodging; instead they prefer to live with other Chinese students who find themselves in a similar situation. This means that they speak Chinese all the time and have no opportunity to practice English at all. Their social interaction is heavily centered on the Chinese community, and they are therefore isolated from the host culture.

For the financial situations, there is a significant change in recent years especially after 2012 when affluent Chinese students flock to US schools. Most of these students are undergraduate students and from excessively rich families. Just as Lai (2012) argued, coinciding with China's rapid economic growth, a distinctive second generation emerged in the early 2000s comprising much more affluent students. Compared to the first generation who were graduates and generally reliant on scholarships to study in the United States, the second generation don't rely on scholarships anymore. Financial issues are not an issue to these students.

## **Concern over Visa Status and Immigration**

There is another very difficult situation that Chinese international students face while pursuing their goals in the United States: concerns about acquiring and keeping a US visa. Chinese students are required by immigration regulations to be full-time students in order to maintain their “F1” visa (student visa). This means they are not allowed to work more hours or to find an off-campus job, even if they have an urgent financial need to support their studies. Also, they cannot apply for student loans because they are neither citizens nor permanent residents of the United States. In a study conducted at Indiana University, Yeh (2000) reported that Chinese international students continually argued they lacked the same kind of resources as US students. Their experiences of being subjected to a marginal status and limited resources generated great anxiety about their future in the United States.

Visa issues are a salient problem when it comes to paying short visits to their families in China. Many Chinese students in the United States dare not go back to China because they are afraid they will be refused visas to return to school. The long separation from their families poses severe challenges to Chinese students.

Moreover, Chinese students face difficulties associated with changing their visa status if they decide to remain in the United States to pursue other life goals after graduation. There are very limited opportunities for foreign students to switch their student visas in order to become permanent residents of the United States. The only possibility for this switch is to be employed as having expertise under the “technical immigrant quota” system (Situ et al. 1995). As a result of this, many Chinese students decide to pursue advanced degrees (doctorate) or those technical-oriented majors in which Americans are relatively underrepresented to maximize their opportunities for future employment in the United States (Situ et al. 1995). According to Yeh (2000), many Chinese students view the F1 student visa as a barrier to their future employment in the United States. Yeh concluded that the chronic stress from the “marginal status” becomes a daily struggle for most mainland Chinese students in the United States.

## **Coping and Help-Seeking Behaviors**

### ***Barrier to Pursuing Counseling***

Although studies demonstrated that Chinese students are experiencing more acute distress than other students (Bourne 1975; Klein et al. 1981; Yang and Clum 1994; Yeh 2000), signs of Chinese students’ stress may not be visible to outsiders as their cultural background tends to camouflage this. Chinese parents, traditionally, have taught their children to be quiet, studious, and not to draw attention to themselves.



Furthermore, cultural factors, “such as the shame and disgrace associated with admitting to emotional problems, the handling of problems within the family rather than relying on outside resources,” prevent Chinese students from seeking outside help (Chuang 1988, p. 2).

Research indicated that Chinese people are least inclined to move beyond family and social networks for mental health needs. They are less likely to seek outside help for emotional concerns. When investigating counseling preferences, Sue and Zane (1985) noted that Chinese students did not actively participate in counseling because they did not want to admit they had emotional difficulties and perceived it a shame to seek counseling. Mau and Jepsen (1990) confirmed that Chinese students find it difficult to admit that they have problems and are less likely to seek help and assistance.

The concerns of “saving face” and shame are integral to traditional Chinese socialization practices (Wilson 1996). To reveal any personal problems is regarded as personal weakness, a lack of resolve and determination, and reflects negatively on the individual’s family (Mau and Jepsen 1990). To “save face,” one is discouraged from expressing concerns and inhibited in seeking help beyond family or close friends. In addition, Chinese generally lack of familiarity of counseling concepts and counseling services, since professional counseling service are nonexistent in China.

Taken together, students from Asian countries, particularly from China, are generally reluctant to initiate a counseling relationship. Their reluctance to use professional psychological services may be related to “a lack of familiarity with counseling services, a greater dependence on family and friendship networks for support, and fear of stigmatization associated with needing formal counseling” (Wilson 1996, p. 24).

Apart from the factors above, researchers provided some hypothesis as to why East Asian students are unlikely to pursue counseling. Anthur (1997) suggested that anxiety about pursuing counseling as well as difficulty communication might prevent international students from expressing their concerns accurately.

## *Coping Resource and Social Support*

### **Psychological Coping Strategies: Confucianism Endurance and Taoism “Take It Easy”**

Focusing on the coping strategies that Chinese students use when encountering difficulties, Yue (1993) studied how students’ understanding of Confucianism and Taoism influences their behavior in handling the stresses they encounter in their social life and academic studies. He noted the strategies students employed that reflected Confucianism included self-reflection and endurance. Self-reflection involves examining and critiquing oneself in situations where one may be responsible for what has happened. The goal is to bring about internal harmony.

Endurance involves tolerating stress with “civility and restraint for one’s sake and to preserve harmonious relationships with others” (p. 20). Frank’s (2000) findings echoed Yue’s study. In the study at the University of Denver, Frank found Chinese female students believe that challenges or difficulties were a natural part of life and that, if they endured them patiently, they would survive. Their cultural concept of *ren* or endurance contributed to their ability to persevere during periods of intense challenge and difficulty. According to Frank, each of Chinese participants was confronted by many challenges and changes during her sojourn in America, and they each practiced *ren* or endurance with courage, patience, and hard work.

In addition to using strategies that are based on Confucianism to cope with difficulties, Yue pointed out that Chinese students also use methods grounded in Taoism. Taoism is another important school of philosophy in Chinese history. The word Tao means “way.” In Taoism, the goal of life is to develop a relationship with the Tao. To cultivate the relationship, an individual seeks to free him- or herself from earthly distractions. These distractions include the influence of social norms, moral precepts, and worldly goals. This freedom enables an individual to be free of anxiety (Honderich 1995). The goal is for the individual to be at peace with whatever life brings. Strategies used by Chinese students that reflected Taoism included practicing attitudes of taking it easy and letting it happen. Taking it easy involves taking life as it comes and not fighting against what life brings. Yue (1993) noted that nonaction in Taoism does not mean to take a passive stance in addressing problems. Instead, nonaction means avoiding actions which are impulsive or contrary to one’s best interests. An attitude of letting it happen submits all matters of life to fate and Tao. In the study at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Xu (2002) found quite a lot of Chinese students recommended employing a take it easy attitude toward English language difficulties.

## **Support Mechanism**

### **Family Support**

Empirical findings (Ye 1992; Ni 2005; Lin 1998) revealed that it is family members rather than outside resources that mainland Chinese students usually turned to for help when in crises or in trouble. Frank (2000) found that Chinese students usually called their family when feeling depressed or frustrated. Zhang (1992) pointed out, the existence of the close ties between Chinese parents and their children and the willingness of parents to sacrifice anything for the sake of their children’s education significantly contribute to Chinese students’ academic achievement.

### **Support from Chinese Student Community**

There is a dichotomy in the function of the Chinese student community. On one hand, Chinese students tend to withdraw from social activities and confine their

interaction within their own community. Consequently, they are further isolated from American culture and lack of culture understanding. Language improvement is hindered as well. On the other hand, the Chinese student community is another available resource which provides support for mainland Chinese students. The Chinese community serves the Chinese students as a means to explore their new surroundings. Just as Feng (1991) reported, Chinese students are ready to help each other. As new students come, old ones always help them, show them around, and teach them about America. Also they tend to live together and interact with their Chinese fellows. Kao (1987) found that students from the PRC ranked other Chinese nationals as their most preferred sources of help for solving adjustment problems. Meanwhile, the Chinese community also becomes a very important mechanism to provide psychological support. Since most Chinese students have experienced varieties of stress in American educational settings, Chinese friends are the important source of emotional support. Although Chinese people do not usually or easily reveal their thoughts and feelings to others, it is not uncommon for them to share their sufferings or pressure (Li 1993).

Both strong family bonds and strong ties to the Chinese students community reflect the self-sufficiency of Chinese culture, both of which contribute to the Chinese students' social isolation from the American culture and provide necessary support when needed (Feng 1991; Zhang 1992).

## **Berry's Stress-Coping Framework**

The conceptual framework for the current study is based upon Berry's (1997) *stress-coping framework*, which considers the cross-cultural experience as a major life event that is characterized by stress, demands cognitive appraisal of the situation, and results in affective, behavioral, and cognitive coping responses. The stress-coping framework focuses on the identification of those factors that function as significant stressors and impair sojourners' adaptation to the new environment. It also helps to identify those coping resources and strategies sojourners used to deal with their stress. According to Berry, both stress and coping are influenced by characteristics of the individual and the society (situation). The conceptual framework is presented as Fig. 3.1.

Specifically, on the macro-level, characteristics of the society of settlement and society of origin are important. Discriminating features of these societies may include social, political, and demographic factors, such as ethnic composition along with salient attitudes toward ethnic and cultural out-groups. On the microlevel, characteristics of the individual and aspects of the situation exert influences on stress, coping, and adaptation. Berry's conceptual framework also distinguishes between influences arising prior to and during the sojourn. In the first instance, factors such as age, gender, education, and personality may be important; in the second, coping strategies or social support may be more relevant. Each of these variable sets is discussed below

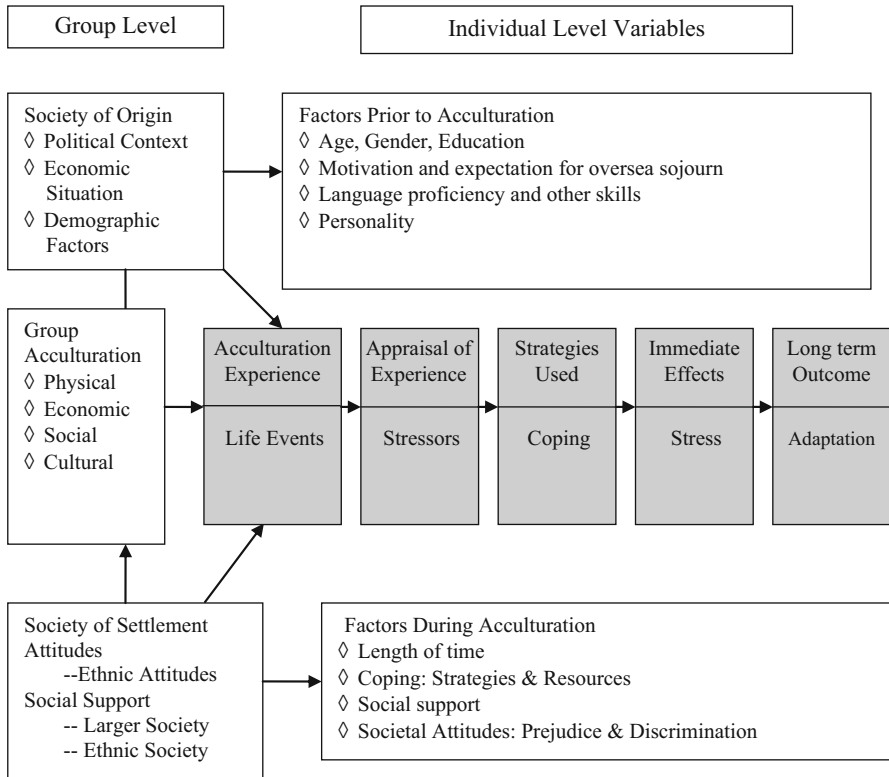


Fig. 3.1 Stress and coping framework for acculturation research

### *Factors in Berry's Model*

#### **Group-Level (Macro-Level) Factors**

##### Society of Origin

The combined political, economic, and demographic conditions being faced by individuals in their society of origin need to be studied as a basis for understanding the migration motivation of immigrated individuals. Using original Chinese resource materials, Orleans (1988) has contributed to the understanding of Chinese policies and practices on foreign study by exploring several overall issues—such as China's concern about a "brain drain" as more Chinese students decide to stay in the United States. Additionally, the cultural characteristics need description to establish cultural features for comparison with the society of settlement as a basis for estimating the cultural distance. Samovar and Porter (1991) cited the United States and China as an example of nations with maximum cultural distance.

## Society of Settlement

Both the historical and attitudinal situation faced by migrants in society of settlement need to be investigated. What are those general orientations a society and its citizens have toward immigration and pluralism? Does the society take steps to support the continuation of cultural diversity as a shared communal resource (e.g., multicultural curricula in schools)?

The discriminating features of the host society, such as ethnic composition, extent of cultural pluralism, and salient attitudes toward ethnic and cultural out-groups, are important. Wang (1992) noted that the culture and ethnic relations in a modern society characterized by rapid acculturation and group identity disintegration hold true for America. Yeh (2000) reported that Chinese international students expressed that they lacked the same kind of resources as US students. Their experiences of being subjected to a marginal status and limited resources generated great anxiety about their future in the US.

## Group-Level Acculturation

Group-level acculturation means that migrant groups usually change substantially as a result of living with two sets of cultural influences. Economic changes can involve a general loss of status or new employment opportunities for the group. Social changes might range from estranged old communities to new friendship or network. Cultural changes range from superficial changes in dresses or food to deeper ones such as language shifts, religious conversions, and value system changes.

## Individual Level (Microlevel) Factors

### Factors Existing Prior to Acculturation

Several factors existing prior to acculturation exert influences on individual's cross-cultural adaptations. In particular, one's age has a known relationship to the way acculturation proceeds. Age has been studied as related to foreign students' academic performance and adjustment difficulties. Studies examining the relationships between foreign students' age and their success adjusting on a foreign campus show inconsistent findings: some show younger students to have more adjustment problems than older students, and others show the opposite (Ward et al. 2001). Gender has variable influence on the acculturation process. Substantial evidence indicates that women may be more at risk for problems than men (Carballo 1994). Education is another factor which is associated with adaptations. Although higher education is predictive of lower stress, a common experience for migrants is a combination of status loss and limited status mobility, which increase the risk of stress (Bochner 1981). There is a relationship between the push and pull motivations and

expectations and stress and adaptation. *Push and pull motivations* were used to explain what may force someone to leave their home country or what may draw them from it to a new country. Incentives that attract people away from home are known as *pull factors*, and circumstances that may help an individual decide to leave their country are known as *push factors* (Ward et al. 2001). When immigrants have extremely intense or excessively high expectations about their life in the new society, and these are not met, this leads to greater stress.

### Factors Arising During Acculturation

Acculturation strategies, coping strategies, and the social support show significant influences on individual's adaptation. Following Berry (1997), we can describe four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. From the point of view of nondominant groups, when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the assimilation strategy is defined. In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with other groups, then the separation alternative is noted. When there is an interest in maintaining one's original culture while in daily interactions with other groups, integration is the option. Finally, if individuals vacillate between their original culture and the host culture, identifying with neither, nor for that matter being accepted in either, then marginalization is identified.

Related to acculturation strategies are the coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have identified two major coping strategies: problem-focused coping (attempting to change or solve the problem) and emotion-focused coping (attempting to regulate the emotions associated with the problem). Social support is another important factor linked to individual's psychological adaptation. For some, links with conationals are associated with lower stress (Ward and Kennedy 1993); for others, links to the members of the society of settlement are more helpful (Berry and Kostovcik 1990). In addition, how long a person has been experiencing acculturation strongly affects the kind and extent of problems experienced (Ward et al. 2001).

## Summary

The literature review was divided in this way with the intention of providing a thorough presentation about the issues of concern to many Chinese international students. The influences on their behavior with regard to seeking support for these concerns were noted. This literature review provides the background to the study and also raises a number of questions which focus this study.

To date, no empirical research has focused solely upon understanding the stress and coping processes of Chinese international students in the United States.

Typically, research has been conducted on international students as a single population. Given that Chinese international students represent the largest number of international students in the United States and that they encounter a culture very different from their own, it is worth developing a deeper understanding of how these students cope with such stress. Research suggests that Chinese international students have the most difficulty adjusting to life in the United States. What makes this adjustment difficult and what do Chinese international students do to cope with this adjustment? Finally, what influences their thinking with regard to seeking support and help for their concerns? These questions are important and have not previously been addressed. Such research could help Chinese international students adjust better to life in American universities and could help American universities adjust to their largest group of foreign students. There does exist information on Chinese cultural beliefs and on the acculturation of Chinese people in America. Until now, however, there has not been any inquiry into the stress and coping processes of Chinese international students, who reside temporarily in the United States, away from China and Chinese culture.

## Chapter 4

# Methodology: Methodology Justification

This study adopts one design of the mixed methods—the sequential explanatory design. This design is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The underlying epistemology for this methodology is based on Behren and Smith's arguments. Behren and Smith (Behrens and Smith 1996) argued that there is compatibility between a statistical analysis and qualitative analysis.

Using a single method of inquiry leaves one open to “method error.” Using more than one method allows one to juxtapose one set of data against another, sequentially posing and discarding alternative hypothesis, and leaving a clear trail for readers to audit, and one hopes, a plausible account of evidence and reasoning about it (p. 947).

Besides epistemology, research purpose also determines the choices of the mixed methods. For the present study, quantitative method, through survey techniques, is helpful to eliminate those factors which were not significant stressors or coping strategies of Chinese students. Also, after comparing the result of the present study with those of previous studies, I found unexpected results arose from the quantitative study but the quantitative study alone could not explain. In this case, qualitative data is employed to assist in interpreting the findings of the quantitative study. Just as Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) maintained, qualitative methods are an essential complement to quantitative methods.

Such methodology is also justified by Tashakkori and Teddlie's (2003) argument. They pointed out that if the purpose of the mixed methods research is initiation (i.e., discovering paradoxes and contradictions), then a sequential mixed analysis is most likely appropriate.



## Data Sources and Collection Procedures

### *Quantitative Data Collection*

#### Survey Construction

I developed question items using the Chinese students' adjustment research literature review, survey research of adjustment problems among college students (Perkins 1977; Xia 1992; Ye 1992; Wang 1992), and Chinese cross-cultural studies (Chuang 1988; Zhang 1992). All of this literature contribute to the content and construct validity of current questionnaire.

In terms of question wording, to ensure the question would be interpreted in the same way by every respondent, I kept the vocabulary level of my questions as low as possible and avoided specialized jargon that would be likely to be misunderstood by some of the Chinese students. When there is no alternative to using specialized terms, I made sure that they were defined on the questionnaire. For instance, I defined the word "cultural shock" as the "the stress resulting from losing familiar signs and symbols and being unable to understand American norms or customs" (Oberg 1960; Bock 1970). Also, to guarantee respondents would not misunderstand some questions only because of the language translation, both English and Chinese version were provided.

To determine the format of this questionnaire, several questionnaire design studies have been reviewed including Babble (1973), Berdie and Anderson (1974), Converse and Presser (1986), Foddy (1993), Moser and Kalton (1972), and Warwick and Linger (1975). In the end, a rating scale questionnaire was chosen as the instrument for the current study.

#### Pilot Work

After doing the literature review and bearing in mind the objective of this current study, initial unstructured interviews with three mainland Chinese students were conducted to get a rough shape of the investigation. To ensure their responses did not influence each other, the interviews were conducted separately and individually. Due to the exploratory nature of these interviews, not each interview has covered all topics nor have the topics been approached in the same order. Whenever a topic proved itself to be productive with a particular respondent, I followed the line of questioning.

Designed based on Berry's model, the Survey of Stressors and Coping Strategies of Mainland Chinese Students (SSCSMCS) (see Appendix B) collected respondents' ratings of the stressfulness of selected academic and social situations, ratings of their coping resources, measures of their social support networks, and selected demographic information. The SSCSMCS specifically consists of 31 items on feelings of stress, rated using a 5-point scale ranging from (1) very seldom to

(5) very often; seven items on help-seeking behavior and 27 items on coping strategy and coping behavior were rated by the same scale. The demographic section asked respondents to provide the following information: gender, age, length of time in the United States, marital status, and major.

### **Survey Distribution**

The survey was conducted in the fall semester of 2008 at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. The survey proceeded in the following manner. First a number of known students were selected and used to make contact with students in different departments on campus. The rest of respondents were selected randomly from the mailing list of the Chinese Students and Scholar Association (CSSA) at ASU and reached through the first groups of known students. In the selection process, special attention was given to ensure representation in field of study and gender. I personally delivered most surveys to convince respondents of the neutrality of the research and to ensure a high response rate. Out of 80 questionnaires distributed, 60 were returned, for a return rate of 75%. Results showed that the sample is representative of mainland Chinese student population at ASU in basic characteristics such as gender and field of study. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were studying mathematics, natural sciences, engineering, or other technically oriented subjects; about 53% of the respondents were male. A summary of demographic data will be provided in Chap. 5.

### **Analysis of Survey Data**

Students' stressors, coping, and help-seeking behaviors will be described by mean and standard deviation. All of the items are presented in order of magnitude of concern based on the mean score for each item. The descriptive data will identify the greatest concerns and the most frequently used coping strategies. The following questions in particular will be answered. What factors (academic, socioculture, marriage or dating, immigration and job opportunity, language, or financial) are the greatest concerns or stressors? What coping strategies are commonly used to deal with these stressors? In the academic area, which factors are the greatest stressors? What are the specific strategies that Chinese students utilized to overcome the academic challenges? In the sociocultural area, which factors are the greatest concerns? What factors tend to account for Chinese students' financial stress? What coping strategies are commonly used to handle their financial problems over time? What conditions tend to account for Chinese students' linguistic stress? How do they deal with various situations? When it comes to job opportunities, visa problems, and immigration issues, what are the greatest concerns?

In addition, unpaired t-tests were performed to determine if individual variables such as age, gender, field of study, marital status, and length of time in the United States affect their stress levels and coping behaviors. Results are presented in

Chap. 5. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine if acculturation strategies affect their stress levels and coping behaviors.

## *Qualitative Data Collection*

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

A semi-structured interview was chosen as the method for collecting data, because this tool is “flexible and likely to promote fruitful reflection by the participants” (Mill 2001, p. 385). It was hoped that the interviews would provide further understanding of the complex nature of Chinese international students’ stressors and help-seeking beliefs and behaviors.

An interview is an efficient way of collecting information. This is particularly true when researchers are interested in “understanding the perceptions of participants, or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events” (Berg 1989, p. 19). The face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interview in this study provided the researcher efficient access to the complex interconnections of personal perceptions. People’s emotions and experiences can be more easily assessed in face-to-face interviews.

### **The Sample**

Selection of participants was in two stages. First, Chinese students were invited to participate in this university-approved project through ads placed on the bulletin board of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association. Students were sent a letter explaining the nature of research, the length of the interview, a statement about confidentiality, and an invitation to students interested in being interviewed to contact the researchers either by e-mail or by phone. Ten students contacted the researchers by e-mail. A second source of interviewees were obtained by asking three student friends and colleagues to participate in the study and to recruit other students. An additional six students were selected and reached through the three personal acquaintances. The recruitment of the sample was not done in a uniform way because the researchers used mixed purposeful sampling, combining various purposeful sampling methods for the current study. Purposive sampling offers researchers a degree of control. With purposive sampling, researchers deliberately seek to include “outliers” conventionally discounted in quantitative approaches. Two sampling methods were mainly employed in the current study: criterion sampling and snowball sampling (Morrow and Smith 2000).

Nineteen mainland Chinese students majoring in different departments of ASU were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview format. Chapter 6 provides brief descriptions of each of the 19 subjects.

## **Interview Structure and Format**

The interview agenda progressed from general to specific questions, with the assumption that valid data are related with the purpose of the current study but expressed in the students' own words. For example, I asked the students first to reflect on their personal life in America and then if they suffered from any stress? If so, what would they say was the most stressful about their life in the United States? How would they characterize their stress? What conditions (social, cultural, academic, financial, visa issues, and marriage or dating) they believe tended to account for their stress? How do they handle the stress over time? I asked them to name a particular item (parents, friends, endurance, take it easy, counselors help, church, etc.) which they believe to be the most important relief of their stress and then asked them to rate how much this item could help them to successfully conquer the stress or how the unavailability of that item would cause them fail to handle the stress. The interview questions (see Appendix B) provided a basic structure for the interview but were not to be considered an exhaustive list of potential topics or areas of investigation. The questions were compiled based upon a review of the literature. Questions 1a to 1g are questions regarding whether the participant experienced stress; questions 2a to 2g are questions regarding participant's experience of any stress resulting from financial, visa, study, cultural adjustments, dating, family relationships, and other concerns as well as the behavior adaptations to these problems; and questions 3a to 3d are questions regarding participant's coping strategies and support mechanisms.

The interview agenda progressed from general to specific questions, with the assumption that valid data, expressed in the students' own words, can be obtained. The interview questions (see Appendix B) provided a basic structure for the interview, but were never considered to be an exhaustive list of potential topics or areas to be explored in this investigation. The interview questions used were based upon a review of the literature. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) suggested, in order to communicate in an effective manner, the interview should be conducted at the participants' level of language. Thus, all interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability was enhanced by gathering responses regarding stress perception and life adaptation of individuals. Construct validity concerns how the instrument, in fact, measures the concepts in question. The research piloted the interview questions with three Chinese international students before beginning the data collection to enhance construct validity.

As for the language, all interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) suggested, in order to communicate in an effective manner, the interview should be conducted at the participants' level of language.

All interviews were translated verbatim from Mandarin Chinese to English. Utmost care was made to translate the meanings of the interview from Chinese to English. All interview contents were translated by the researcher who is fluent in both languages. In order to minimize the bias and error in data collection and analysis, upon the completion of data collection, the researchers sent back each interview transcript to the corresponding participant to check for inaccuracy or errors created through translation. All of participants in this study checked the data and transcripts. Interview sample questions also were checked by two professors who were familiar with and knowledgeable about the subject of the study. They also checked the whole qualitative data analysis process. In addition, the audit trail was given to an independent researcher for feedback on the research conceptualization and research processes. He also carefully checked all of the finding result (themes, categories, etc.) and traced back to the original data to see if it made sense.

Also, students were assured that their responses would not be associated with their names. Based on mutual trust, I attained the good rapport with interviewees during the interviews. All interviews were conducted on or around the campus. In order to accommodate each subject, the interview took place at the subject's choices of location around the campus, such as the library or dorm. Interviews averaged 1 h in length. They were tape-recorded and then the tapes were transcribed. For three participants who felt uncomfortable being tape-recorded, the interviews were recorded in notebooks by the researcher.

### **Analysis of the Qualitative Data**

The analysis of interview transcriptions followed the guidelines described by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Bogdan and Taylor (1975). The researcher reviewed the material systematically while remaining open to emerging themes. For instance, some categories such as "majors" and "support from church" emerged as the researchers grew more familiar with the local context, while some preset categories such as "education" and "personality" were discarded when tested against the extant data. The specific procedures used were described as below:

1. Data reduction and the creation of categories for analysis. Taking data to be coded by preset categories, and going through all data and sorting it into categories. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that categories should be defined before collecting data; the instrument should be developed in advance and have a structure or design set before being used in the field. Following Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach, the researcher had Berry's stress-coping framework in mind and defined the categories before starting the study. When coding, the researcher tried to find the links between the codes and merged them into preset categories.
2. Rereading the data set and sorting the categories into broader themes, while remaining open to new analytic categories. Provisional themes were drawn from all of the data. Just as Bogdan and Taylor (1975) suggested, the themes and

patterns that emerge were analyzed to discover the shared meanings and to see if certain themes ran through the experiences of all interviewees.

3. Representation and presentation of the data. This is the development of some sort of display for organizing the data. Data display refers to the systematic visualization or presentation of the data.
4. Verification. For the verification, various methods were applied such as participant check, peer check, and audit trail (see the result and trace back to the original data to see if it makes sense).
5. The analysis of interview transcriptions followed the guidelines described by Miles and Huberman (1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that categories should be defined before collecting data; the instrument should be developed in advance and have a structure or design set before being used in the field. When coding, the researchers tried to find the links between the codes and merged them into preset categories. In addition, the researchers reviewed the data systematically while remaining open to the following emerging themes and categories: (1) data reduction and the creation of categories for analysis; (2) rereading the data set and sorting the categories into broader themes, while remaining open to new analytic categories; (3) representation and presentation of the data; and (4) verification through methods such as a participant check, peer check, and use of an audit trail.

### **Ethical Considerations**

For ethical consideration, no subjects were forced into participation. Participation in this study was voluntary and strictly confidential. Subjects were given enough information about the nature of this research to decide whether they want to participate. Subjects were told that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to choose not participate or to withdraw from the study at any time.

In order to protect the privacy of each subject, the content of each individual interview was withheld from the other participants. The researcher transcribed the interview data verbatim, and all interview transcriptions were prepared only by the researcher. All data (taped interviews) were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office. I retained the data only for the length of time it takes to transcribe, code, and analyze, but no later than May 31, 2009. After that date, the tapes were erased.

## Chapter 5

# Survey Findings

The results of this study are presented in three chapters. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the survey, including demographic data of the respondents. Chapters 6 and 7 present the results from the interviews. Chapter 8 will discuss the findings in the context of the research questions and the literature reviewed in Chaps. 2 and 3.

### Demographic Data

Selected demographic data for the 60 students who completed and returned the Survey of Stressors and Coping Strategies of Mainland Chinese Students (SSCSMCS) are analyzed and are reported as follows:

1. Gender: There were 33 males (53.3%) and 27 females (46.6%) in this study.
2. Age: The subjects were requested to place themselves in one of three age categories. Nineteen (31.6%) students were under age 25, 29 students were between the age of 26 and 31 (41.6%), and 12 students (20%) were 32 or older. As subjects were not asked to provide their exact age, a mean age cannot be calculated.
3. Academic Status: Of the 60 survey respondents, 7 (11.7%) were in master degree programs and 53 (88.3%) were in doctoral degree programs.
4. Marital Status: 19 of the 60 survey respondents (31.7%) were married, and 41 (68.3%) were single.
5. Majors: 24 students were engineering students, 16 were natural science majors, 12 were social science majors, and 8 were business school students.

## Survey Findings

### *Stressors*

Findings reveal that the life of Chinese students in the United States has never been easy and they have had to endure multifaceted life stresses. Results indicate that job opportunities, visa, and immigration concerns ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ), academic pressure ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ), language barrier ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ), and culture shock ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) rank the highest, followed by dating or marriage pressure ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and financial concern ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ). Results are presented in Table 5.1.

### *Coping and Help-Seeking Behaviors*

Chinese students prefer to cope with their stress by enduring the problem ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) or just letting the stress go ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ). When seeking help from others, they primarily turned to their family ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) or other Chinese students ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). Going to church for religious comfort ( $M = 1.55$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) and consulting a counselor or psychologist for professional help ( $M = 1.31$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) were the last two choices when it comes to dealing with their stress (see Table 5.2).

**Table 5.1** Rank order, means, *SD* of stressors

Rank	Categories	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Job opportunities, visa, and immigration concerns	60	4.50	0.74
2	Academic pressure	60	4.32	1.45
3	Language barrier	60	3.78	1.10
4	Culture shock	60	3.60	0.99
5	Dating or marriage pressure	60	3.58	1.02
6	Financial concern	60	3.56	0.62
7	Homesickness and loneliness	60	2.48	1.44

**Table 5.2** Rank order, means, *SD* of coping behavior, and help sources

Rank	Coping strategy	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Endurance	60	3.37	1.21
2	Let it go	60	3.01	1.20
3	Friends	60	2.85	1.11
4	Parents	60	2.85	1.37
5	Church	60	1.55	1.03
6	Counselors/psychiatrists	60	1.31	0.62



**Table 5.3** Rank order, means, *SD* of academic concerns

Rank	Academic concerns	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Class interaction	60	3.01	1.71
2	Academic paper writing	60	2.73	1.08
3	Adjusting to the American educational settings	60	2.56	1.15
4	Advisor relations	60	2.51	1.09
5	Understanding lectures	60	2.50	0.94

**Table 5.4** Unpaired t-test for differences between social science and engineering students in the level of difficulty of understanding lectures

Major	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social science	12	2.83	0.57	0.66	2.58	0.014*
Engineering	24	2.16	0.96			

Note: \**p* < 0.05

**Table 5.5** Unpaired t-test for differences between single and married students in the level of difficulty of adjusting to the American educational settings

Marital status	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Single	41	2.80	1.07	0.75	2.44	0.018*
Married	19	2.05	1.17			

Note: \**p* < 0.05

### ***Academic Stress and Academic Coping Strategy***

As for the academic stress, I asked respondents to rank on a 5-point scale, from 1 not a challenge at all to 5 a critical challenge, the extent of challenges of four factors in American academic settings. Results indicated that the classroom interaction (speaking up, making presentations, and asking questions) (*M* = 3.01, *SD* = 1.71) and academic paper writing (*M* = 2.73, *SD* = 1.08) rank the highest. Regarding the difficulty of understanding the lectures, significant difference is observed across majors (*t* = 2.58, *p* = 0.014 < 0.05). Social science students (*M* = 2.83, *SD* = 0.57) felt it was much more difficult to understand professors’ lectures than the engineering students did (*M* = 2.16, *SD* = 0.96). With respect to the difficulty of adjusting to the American educational settings, a significant difference is identified between married and single students (*t* = 2.44, *p* = 0.018 < 0.05). Married students (*M* = 2.80, *SD* = 1.07) felt much easier to adjust to the American academic settings than single students (*M* = 2.05, *SD* = 1.17) did. One possible explanation is that married students might get more information and support from their spouses who came earlier and were more familiar with American academic settings (see Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5).

**Table 5.6** Rank order, means, *SD* of academic coping strategy

Rank	Academic coping strategy	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Spending more time studying	60	3.71	1.02
2	Seeking advices from friends	60	3.28	1.09
3	Practicing English	60	3.08	1.23
4	Anticipating and preparing to avoid problems	60	3.06	1.19
5	Increasing reading after class	60	3.03	1.24
6	Observing American academic settings and other American students to make behavior adjustments	60	2.21	1.13

In order to understand the coping strategies students used to overcome their academic difficulties, a question was asked about the relative frequency of six strategies. Answers were given on a 5-point scale with 1 being very seldom and 5 being very often. Among the six strategies, Chinese students prefer to cope with their stress by spending more time or effort on studying to enhance academic strength ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and seeking insights or suggestions from friends or classmates ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). These two strategies were followed by the other three coping strategies, practicing English ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ), anticipating and preparing to avoid potential problems ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ), and increasing reading after class to compensate for weaknesses in listening comprehension during lectures ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ), all three of which have a similar frequency rating (see Table 5.6).

The strategy of observing American students and making behavior adjustments in American class settings ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) ranks the lowest among the six strategies. This suggests that most Chinese students normally choose not to adopt the strategy of behavior adjustment. Behavior adjustment, according to Greer (2005), refers to the strategy of incorporating the conduct that is generally linked to the American culture into their available behaviors and discarding the thoughts or behaviors that is related to Chinese culture if they prove a hindrance to their academic success. Most Chinese students in this study obviously give high priority to enhancing their academic strength by working hard or seeking suggestions from friends as opposed to adopting American behaviors. One possible reason is that, for Chinese students, the new educational environment is so confusing, ambiguous, and overwhelming that they tend to wrap themselves up in their academic struggles and appear indifferent to other aspects of academic life on campus.

There is a significant difference across the majors with regard to behavior adjustment ( $t = 3.34$ ,  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ). Students in social science ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) have a higher tendency to overcome their academic problems by observing American academic settings and other American students to make behavioral adjustment than students in engineering departments do ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ). Gender difference is observed as well. Female students ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) more prefer to use the strategy of observing American students and making behavioral adjustments than male students do ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) (see Tables 5.7 and 5.8).

**Table 5.7** Unpaired t-test for differences between social science and engineering students in the frequency of using the strategy of observing American students and making behavior adjustment

Major	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social science	12	3.41	0.99	1.04	3.34	0.002**
Engineering	24	2.79	1.14			

Note: \*\**p* < 0.01

**Table 5.8** Unpaired t-test for differences between female and male students in the frequency of using the strategy of observing American students and making behavior adjustments

Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Female	27	3.50	0.84	1.00	3.88	0.000**
Male	33	2.50	1.14			

Note: \*\**p* < 0.01

In order to know which factors are important in motivating Chinese students to study hard in the United States, on a 5-point scale, with 1 being not important at all and 5 very important, I asked respondents to rank the relative importance of five factors.

Results indicate “good grades bring the feeling of self-esteem and self-worth” (*M* = 3.38, *SD* = 1.66) and “education is the only hope for social acceptance and financial security in the United States” (*M* = 3.20, *SD* = 1.22) were the most important factors motivating Chinese students to study hard in the United States. These two factors were followed by the other three motivators, “high expectation from parents” (*M* = 2.95, *SD* = 1.17), “feeling guilty about parental sacrifices” (*M* = 2.90, *SD* = 1.10), and “social comparison with other Chinese students in terms of educational achievement” (*M* = 2.88, *SD* = 1.22), all of which have a similar rating of importance.

### ***Sociocultural Challenges***

In order to gain information about students’ social life on an American campus, I asked respondents to rank their difficulties in four different social scenarios on a 5-point scale, with 1 being not challenging at all and 5 a critical challenge.

Results show that “making good friends with Americans” (*M* = 3.73, *SD* = 1.10) and “successfully communicating with Americans” (*M* = 3.50, *SD* = 1.28) were the most difficult things for Chinese students to adjust on an American campus. This confirms general discussions about Chinese international students’ social challenges in the United States. Cho (1990), for instance, found the general lack of social skills among Chinese students often led to feelings social isolation. On the other hand, in contrast to previous findings, the current findings indicate that American sociocultural values, such as individualism, competitiveness, and assertiveness (*M* = 2.61, *SD* = 1.23), are the least difficult for Chinese students to

**Table 5.9** Rank order, means, *SD* of sociocultural concerns

Rank	Sociocultural concerns	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Making good friends with Americans	60	3.73	1.10
2	Successfully communicating with Americans	60	3.50	1.28
3	Knowing how to participate and behave in American social situations	60	3.25	1.03
4	Accepting American sociocultural values such as individualism and competitiveness	60	2.61	1.23

**Table 5.10** Unpaired t-test for differences between female and male students in the severity of social concerns about how to behave in social settings

Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Female	27	2.92	0.87	0.59	2.32	0.02*
Male	33	3.51	1.09			

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

**Table 5.11** Unpaired t-test for differences between engineering school and business school students in the severity of social concerns about how to behave in social settings

Major	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Engineering	24	3.58	0.92	0.83	2.22	0.03*
Business	8	2.75	0.88			

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

accept. Previous studies (Sun and Chen 1997; Frank 2000) found that American values of individualism and assertiveness are one of the most difficult things for PRC students to adjust to due to cultural differences. This discrepancy suggests that Chinese students' value system changed from previous generations. China's open-door policy and the increased cultural exchange between the United States and China might account for the changes (see Table 5.9).

In terms of social skills such as how to participate and behave in an American social situation, such as at parties, happy hour, receptions, or ceremonies, significant difference is identified across gender and majors among the subjects. Male students feel it is much more challenging than female students do ( $t = 2.32$ ,  $p = 0.02 < 0.05$ ). Engineering students feel more challenged than students in business school do ( $t = 2.22$ ,  $p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ) (see Tables 5.10 and 5.11).

### ***Language Barrier and Strategies***

One question was asked about how often each of the linguistic scenarios is making Chinese students feel depressed or stressed. This question was on a 5-point scale: 1 being seldom and 5 being very often. Results indicate that Chinese students are

**Table 5.12** Rank order, means, *SD* of language concerns

Rank	Language concerns	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Writing research-based papers	60	3.01	1.71
2	Making presentations	60	2.73	1.08
3	Casual chatting with Americans	60	2.56	1.15
4	Talking to advisors	60	2.51	1.09

**Table 5.13** Unpaired t-test for differences between social science and engineering students in the severity of language concerns about talking to advisors

Major	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean diff	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social science	12	3.08	1.08	0.875	2.29	0.03*
Engineering	24	2.20	1.06			

Note: \**p* < 0.05

stressed most when writing research-based papers or projects which will be judged and evaluated by American professors (*M* = 3.28, *SD* = 1.21) and making presentations where the majority of the audience is made up of native speakers (*M* = 3.15, *SD* = 1.10). The other two scenarios, “casual chatting with Americans” (*M* = 2.60, *SD* = 1.16) and “talking to advisors” (*M* = 2.41, *SD* = 1.14), are less stressful for them. In terms of talking to advisors, significant difference was identified across majors among subjects. Unpaired t-test indicates that subjects who majored in social sciences were more stressed to talk to their advisors than their counterparts in the engineering departments (*t* = -2.29, *p* = 0.03 < 0.05). The possible reason might be that natural science majors do not require as high competence in language skills as do social sciences. Additionally, social sciences require better understanding of American culture, values, and social systems (see Tables 5.12 and 5.13).

Another question was asked to evaluate how important those factors are in explaining Chinese students’ language difficulties. Answers were on a 5-point scale with 1 being not important at all and 5 very important. Results indicate that lack of contextual knowledge or cultural background (*M* = 3.62, *SD* = 1.10), infrequent chances to practice English (*M* = 3.25, *SD* = 1.39), and inadequate language training (*M* = 3.10, *SD* = 1.28) rank the highest among the factors. Significant difference across majors shows that language demands vary from major to major and high language demands for a particular major explain some students’ difficulties (*t* = 2.259, *p* = 0.03 < 0.05). Social science students think their majors significantly accounted for their language barrier (*M* = 3.50, *SD* = 1.31), while engineering students think their language difficulties were less influenced by their majors (*M* = 2.54, *SD* = 1.14) (see Tables 5.14 and 5.15).

As for the strategies used to deal with language difficulties, one question was asked to evaluate how frequently Chinese students used each of the strategies to deal with their language difficulties. Answers were given on a 5-point scale with 1 being seldom and 5 very often. Results reveal that Chinese students prefer using circumlocution (*M* = 3.95, *SD* = 0.89), repetition (*M* = 3.76, *SD* = 1.01),

**Table 5.14** Rank order, means, *SD* of factors accounting for language barrier

Rank	Factors accounting for language barrier	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Lack of contextual knowledge or cultural background	60	3.62	1.10
2	Infrequent chances to practice English	60	3.25	1.39
3	Inadequate language training	60	3.10	1.28
4	The influence of Chinese language	60	3.05	1.28
5	Language demand is pretty high in my major	60	2.88	1.29

**Table 5.15** Unpaired t-test for differences between social science and engineering students in the importance of the factor “Language demands are various from major to major, and language demand is pretty high for my major”

Major	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social science	12	3.50	1.31	0.95	2.259	0.03*
Engineering	24	2.54	1.14			

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

**Table 5.16** Rank order, means, *SD* of strategies dealing with language barriers

Rank	Strategies	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Circumlocution	60	3.95	0.89
2	Repetition	60	3.76	1.01
3	Approximation	60	3.68	0.98
4	Self-solving	60	3.43	1.18
5	Appealing for assistance	60	3.30	1.12
6	Confirmation check	60	2.95	1.19
7	Smiling and pretending to understand	60	2.75	1.36
8	Keeping quiet to avoid problems	60	2.71	1.12

approximation ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ), and self-solving (e.g., practicing language) ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ). Keeping quiet to avoid problems ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) and smiling and pretending to understand ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) were least cited resources (see Table 5.16).

### ***Financial Pressure and Strategies***

Regarding financial pressure, a question was asked about the relative importance of five factors in explaining students’ financial pressure. Answers were given on a 5-point scale with 1 being not important at all and 5 very important. Among the five factors, the income gap between China and the United States ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) and lack of support mechanisms (e.g., loans available to American students are not as relevant or as available to Chinese students) ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) rank the

**Table 5.17** Rank order, means, *SD* of factors accounting for financial pressure

Rank	Factors	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	The income gap between China and the United States	60	3.31	1.25
2	Lack of support mechanisms	60	3.00	1.32
3	Unavailability of assistantships in my major	60	2.85	1.16
4	Chinese students are not allowed to seek off-campus employment	60	2.75	1.14
5	The currency gap between China and the United States	60	2.68	1.20

**Table 5.18** Unpaired t-test for differences between social science and engineering students in the importance of the factor “illegal to seek off-campus employment”

Major	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social science	12	3.58	1.38	1.00	2.28	0.03*
Engineering	24	2.58	1.16			

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

highest, followed by the factors of “unavailability of scholarship in my major,” “not allowed to seek off-campus job,” and “the currency gap between China and the United States” (see Table 5.17).

As to how important the factor of “Chinese students are not allowed to seek off-campus employment” is in explaining financial pressure, there is significant difference across majors among respondents ( $t = 2.28, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ). Social science students ( $M = 3.58, SD = 1.16$ ) think this factor significantly accounts for their financial pressure more than engineering students do ( $M = 2.58, SD = 1.16$ ) (see Table 5.18). This probably is because research assistantships or teaching assistantships were more widely available in the fields of science and technology than in the humanities and social sciences. The unavailability of assistantship means most students in the social sciences must seek part-time jobs. As such, Chinese students in social sciences suffer a double frustration by not being able to legally work off-campus and not being permitted to apply for student loans.

In addition, I asked students to rate how often is each of the strategies they used to cope with the financial pressure. Questions were formatted in the same fashion as above. Results show that among the five strategies, “trying best to secure a teaching or research assistantship” ( $M = 3.91, SD = 1.16$ ) and “living a modest life” ( $M = 3.51, SD = 1.26$ ) rank the highest, followed by two other strategies “choosing a university based on how much financial aid they could receive rather than on the academic reputation of the particular institution” ( $M = 3.25, SD = 1.15$ ) and “transferring majors to wherever financial aid was available if there is no any financial support provided by current majors” ( $M = 3.13, SD = 1.13$ ) (see Table 5.19).

In terms of “securing the assistantship,” significant difference was observed between married and single students ( $t = 2.32, p = 0.02 < 0.05$ ). The assistantship security is more important for single students ( $M = 4.14, SD = 0.93$ ) than it is for married students ( $M = 3.42, SD = 1.46$ ). The possible reason is that married

**Table 5.19** Rank order, means, *SD* of strategies used to cope with the financial pressure

Rank	Factors	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Securing the TA or RA	60	3.91	1.16
2	Living a modest life	60	3.51	1.26
3	Choosing a university based on the availability of assistantship	60	3.25	1.15
4	Transferring to the majors whenever financial aid is available	60	3.13	1.13
5	Seeking off-campus employment, even it is illegal	60	2.25	1.31

**Table 5.20** Unpaired t-test for differences between single and married students in the frequency of using the strategy of securing the assistantship

Marital status	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Single	41	4.41	0.93	0.725	2.32	0.02*
Married	19	3.32	1.46			

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

**Table 5.21** Unpaired t-test for differences between doctoral and master students in the frequency of using the strategy of transferring majors to wherever financial aid was available

Academic status	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Doctoral	49	3.34	1.33	1.16	3.585	0.002**
Master	11	2.18	0.87			

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$

students can count on their spouse for financial support if they lose their assistantship, while single students barely have any financial assistance in the United States besides themselves (see Table 5.20).

Regarding “transferring majors to wherever financial aid was available if there is no any financial support provided by the current major,” significant difference is identified across academic status ( $t = 3.585$ ,  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ). Doctoral students ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) are much more likely to consider using this strategy than masters students are ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). The possible reasons for this might be because the doctoral programs are much longer than master’s program and it is difficult for Chinese students to support themselves without any financial aid for 4 or 5 years (see Table 5.21).

Among the five strategies, seeking off-campus jobs is the least used strategy to beat the financial pressure ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ). Regarding the strategy of seeking off-campus jobs, significant difference across age among the respondents is observed ( $t = 2.14$ ,  $p = 0.04 < 0.05$ ). Older students (above 32) more frequently chose to seek off-campus job to beat their financial pressure ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) than younger students did (below 25) ( $M = 1.57$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) (see Table 5.22).



**Table 5.22** Unpaired t-test for differences between students above 32 and students below 25 in the frequency of using the strategy of seeking off-campus jobs

Age	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Above 32	12	2.50	1.50	0.92	2.14	0.04*
Below 25	24	1.57	0.90			

Note: \**p* < 0.05

**Table 5.23** Rank order, means, *SD* of job, visa, and immigration concerns

Rank	Job, visa, and immigration concerns	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Planning to stay in the United States and find a job after I finish my degree program	60	4.05	1.12
2	F1 students visa will be a barrier to my future employment in the United States	60	3.90	1.14
3	Feeling stressful about the fact that my F1 visa will expire and I have to leave the United States, if I am unable to find a job within a year after my graduation	60	3.30	1.70
4	Feeling stressful about my future job opportunities in the United States	60	3.20	1.73
5	Feeling stressful about my future job opportunities in China	60	2.13	1.22

### *Job Opportunities and Visa Problems*

In order to gain the information about students’ future intention of staying in America or returning to China, I asked respondents to rank the possibilities in five different statements on a 5-point scale with 1 being unlikely and 5 very likely. Regarding their future job opportunities, visa problems, and immigration concerns, Chinese students tend to remain in the United States to pursue other life goals after graduation (*M* = 4.05, *SD* = 1.12). Most of them view the F1 student visa as a barrier for their future employment in the United States (*M* = 3.90, *SD* = 1.14). They are concerned about the fact that their F1 visa will expire and they will have to leave United States, if they are unable to find a job within a year after their graduation (*M* = 3.30, *SD* = 1.27). They are more worried about their future job opportunities in the United States (*M* = 3.2, *SD* = 1.23) than those available in China (*M* = 2.13, *SD* = 1.22) (see Table 5.23).

In terms of their future job opportunities in China, significant difference across length of stay in the United States among subjects is identified (*t* = 2.23, *p* = 0.03 < 0.05). Students who have been in the United States more than 4 years are more stressed about their future job opportunities in China (*M* = 2.72, *SD* = 2.44) than those students who have been in the United States less than a year (*M* = 1.83, *SD* = 0.92) (see Table 5.24).

**Table 5.24** Unpaired t-test for differences between students staying in the United States more than 4 years and students less than a year in the severity of future job opportunities in China

Length of stay	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
More than 4 years	18	2.72	2.44	0.88	2.23	0.03*
Less than a year	18	1.83	0.92			

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

**Table 5.25** Rank order, means, *SD* of acculturation strategy

Rank	Strategies	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Integration	60	4.08	1.09
2	Marginalization	60	2.90	1.39
3	Assimilation	60	2.50	1.09
4	Separation	60	2.25	1.28

### *Acculturation Strategy*

In terms of acculturation strategies, a general question was asked regarding whether students' views of life were more Chinese or American. Respondents were asked to rank four acculturation strategies (integration, marginalization, assimilation, and separation) on a 5-point scale with 1 being not true and 5 being very true. Results indicate that the integration strategy ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) ranks the highest among the four strategies, followed by marginalization, assimilation, and separation. Such results suggest that most Chinese students seek daily interaction with Americans while maintaining their cultural identity as Chinese. Regarding marginalization strategy, gender difference is observed ( $t = 3.12$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). Female students ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) perceive themselves as more marginalized than male students do ( $M = 2.42$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ). This suggests that comparing to male students, female Chinese students vacillate more between Chinese and American cultures, identifying with neither, nor for that matter being accepted by either (see Tables 5.25 and 5.26).

In order to more clearly see whether the acculturation strategies significantly account for Chinese students' overall stress, a regression analysis was conducted. Results indicate that the linear combination of four acculturation strategies were significantly related to the Chinese students' acculturation stress,  $F(60) = 4.32$ ,  $p = 0.004 < 0.05$ . Regression analysis also indicates that among the four strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization), marginalization is the only significant contributor that explains the variance in the Chinese students' appraisal of their overall pressure ( $t = 2.57$ ,  $P = 0.01 < 0.05$ ). Students who identified themselves as more marginalized were much more stressed than those students who perceived themselves as less marginalized. The other three acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, and separation) do not account for a significant additional variance in Chinese students' overall stress, which suggests that separation,

**Table 5.26** Unpaired t-test for differences between female and male students in the frequency of using the marginalization acculturation strategy

Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Female	27	3.48	1.34	1.06	3.12	0.003**
Male	33	2.42	1.27			

Note: \*\**p* < 0.01

**Table 5.27** Rank order, means, *SD* of coping strategy

Rank	Coping strategies	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Problem-focused strategy	60	4.13	1.09
2	Emotional-focused strategy	60	3.83	1.02
3	Avoidance-focused strategy	60	3.66	0.93

assimilation, and integration are not significantly related to the students’ evaluation of their overall pressure in the United States.

### ***Coping Strategies***

As for coping strategies, respondents were asked to rank three-type strategies (problem-focused, emotional-focused, and avoidance-focused) on a 5-point scale with 1 being used seldom and 5 being used very often. Results indicate that problem-focused (*M* = 4.13, *SD* = 1.09) ranked the highest among these three strategies, followed by emotion-focused and avoidance-focused (see Table 5.27).

In terms of coping strategies, there is no significant difference across gender, majors, length of stay, academic status, marital status, age, and other individual variables.

### ***Summary of Individual Variables***

Individual variables such as gender, major, age, marital status, and length of stay show significant influences on stress. As for academic pressure, no significant gender differences were observed. Other stressors and concerns, however, varied across gender among the subjects. Female Chinese students expressed more anxiety and frustration in language situations (*t* = 2.69, *p* = 0.009 < 0.05) and dating problems (*t* = 2.18, *p* = 0.03 < 0.05), while male students were more easily subject to the stress of future vocational achievement and immigration issues (*t* = 2.93, *p* = 0.007 < 0.05).

Where significant differences between majors were identified, social science students rated their stress significantly more severe than natural science or

engineering students did. Social science students recorded experiencing more financial stress than students in natural science did ( $t = 3.85, p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ). Language problems and concerns varied across majors among Chinese students as well ( $t = 3.06, p = 0.005 < 0.05$ ), with social science students having more language barriers than natural science students.

Significant differences in stress levels were also observed between married and single students. Married students experienced substantially less stress than single students did when it comes to academic pressure ( $t = 3.11, p = 0.003 < 0.05$ ), loneliness ( $t = 2.20, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ), dating or marriage problems ( $t = 3.63, p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ), and cultural shock ( $t = 2.17, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ). With the support of their spouse, married students' adjustment is likely to be less stressful compared to that of single students.

Age showed variable influence on the acculturation process as well. Older students experienced more visa, job, and immigration pressure ( $t = 2.17, p = 0.014 < 0.05$ ), while younger students were more easily subject to academic pressure, homesickness, and loneliness ( $t = 2.73, p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ).

Students' length of stay exerted influences on the stress level as well. Students who have been in the United States for more than 4 years experienced more stress resulting from future vocational opportunities and immigration issues ( $t = 2.17, p = 0.014 < 0.05$ ), while students in the United States less than a year were more easily subject to language issues ( $t = 2.73, p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ).

The follow-up qualitative study provides additional evidence to further validate the result of the quantitative study. For Chinese students, exposure to American higher education is always stressful. Facing the new environment, new culture, academic challenges, linguistic barriers, financial pressures, long separation from families, as well as concerns over visa status and future immigration, students find themselves experiencing a variety of stresses. Chinese students reported having stress and concerns in three major areas: personal, sociocultural, and academic. Personal concerns were divided into four subcategories: (a) loneliness and homesickness, (b) pressure from dating or marriage, (c) job opportunities and visa problems, and (d) financial pressure. Sociocultural concerns included the following categories: (a) interactions with Americans, (b) cultural deficiency, and (c) social isolation. Academic concerns included the following categories: (a) language barrier, (b) achievement, and (c) interactions with faculties.

## Chapter 6

# Chinese International Students' Stressors in the United States

This chapter mainly examines what the most stressful aspects of Chinese students' personal, social, and academic lives in the United States are, how they characterize their stress, and what conditions they believe tend to account for their stress. The interview results are reported according to themes that emerged during data analysis. Excerpts of respondents' statements are used to illustrate the results.

### Interview Results

#### *Settings of the Study*

The interviews were conducted with Chinese international students who attended a large, public university, in the southwestern United States, with a Chinese international student enrollment of approximately 1500, representing almost 3% of the total enrollment. Graduate students represent 90% of Chinese international students, undergraduates represent 9% of Chinese international students, and 1% of Chinese international students are engaged in other nondegree programs. The Chinese international student population is approximately three-fourths male and one-fourth female.

Nineteen Chinese international students participated in this study. The participants attended a large, public university, in the southwestern United States, with a Chinese international student enrollment of approximately 1500, representing almost 3% of the total enrollment. The interviewees were master's or doctoral students in liberal arts, applied science, engineering, social science, business, and education. There were ten females and eight males in this study. Their ages ranged from 22 to 38, and their length of residence in the United States ranged from 2 to 8 years. Thirteen were not married at the time of being interviewed; the six married respondents resided with their spouses.

## *Participants*

Participant 1: A single, female, master's student in her early 30s. She was enrolled in the business administration department. She had been in the United States for 2 years. She lived in Canada for a year before coming to the United States.

Participant 2: A single, female, doctoral student in her late 20s. She was enrolled in the sociology department. She had been in the United States for 3 years and a half.

Participant 3: A single, female, doctoral student in her late 20s. She was enrolled in the political science department. She had been in the United States for 4 years.

Participant 4: A married, female, doctoral student in her early 30s. She was enrolled in the department of finance. She had been in the United States for 6 years.

Participant 5: A married, female, doctoral student in her late 20s. She was enrolled in the social justice department. She had been in the United States for 2 years and a half.

Participant 6: A single, male, doctoral student in his late 20s. He was enrolled in the accounting department. He had been in the United States for 5 years and a half.

Participant 7: A married, male, doctoral student in his late 20s. He was enrolled in the electrical engineering department. He had been in the United States for 5 years.

Participant 8: A single, female, doctoral student in her late 30s. She was enrolled in the mechanical engineering department.

Participant 9: A married, male, master student in his early 20s. He was enrolled in the biochemistry department. He had been in the United States for a year.

Participant 10: A single, male, doctoral student in his late 20s. He was enrolled in the industry engineering department.

Participant 11: A single, female, doctoral student in her mid-20s. She was enrolled in the public administration department. She had been in the United States for 1 year and a half.

Participant 12: A single, female, master student in her mid-20s. She was enrolled in the music department. She had been in the United States for 2 years and a half.

Participant 13: A male, doctoral student in his early 30s. He was enrolled in the physics department. He had been in the United States for 6 years.

Participant 14: A single, female, doctoral student in her early 30s. She was enrolled in the environment engineering department. She had previously lived in Holland for 2 years before coming to the United States.

Participant 15: A married, male, doctoral student in his mid-30s. He was enrolled in the computer science department. He had been in the United States for 2 years.

Participant 16: A female, doctoral student in her early 30s. She was enrolled in the educational psychology department. She had been in the United States for 5 years and a half.

Participant 17: A single male, doctoral student in his early 30s. He was enrolled in the bioengineering department. He had been in the United States for 6 years.

Participant 18: A single female, doctoral student in her early 20s. She was enrolled in the chemistry department. She had been in the United States for 3 months.

Participant 19: A married female, doctoral student in her late 20s. She was enrolled in the organization behavior department. She had been in the United States for 1 year and a half. She lived in England for several years before coming to the United States.

## ***Interview Results***

To meet the objectives of this study, interview questions were formulated to elicit responses regarding the stressors, coping strategies, and behaviors of Chinese international students. Grouping of the data obtained from interviews revealed five categories which reflected five broad themes: (1) personal concerns, (2) socio-cultural stress, (3) academic pressure, (4) coping strategies, and (5) coping beliefs. Data is presented under each of these broad themes, grouped by subcategories. Examples of respondent's statements illustrate each theme. Students' real names are not given, neither is any identifying information, in order to protect their confidentiality.

### **Personal Concerns**

The theme of personal concerns includes the subcategories of (a) loneliness and homesickness, (b) pressure from dating or marriage, (c) job opportunities and visa problems, and (d) financial pressure.

#### **Loneliness and Homesickness**

Students identified being away from family and friends, and missing familiar signs of China as contributing to feelings of loneliness and homesickness. The loneliness and homesickness was basically caused by the long period of separation from their loved ones.

A female music student stated:

I missed my parents in China so much. I have so many friends in China, but here I am alone. I do not have anyone to discuss what happened to me, what I saw, or how I felt. I am the only student in my department, and there are no other Chinese students around. It is difficult for me to concentrate whenever my homesickness is so intense. Many times, my stress is so high that I cannot focus myself well. I just sit and my brain goes blank. (Participant 12)

Partially responsible for this separation were some policies and regulations formulated by the American government. In recent years, there has been increasing

tendency for the American government to reduce the number of entrance visas issued to spouses and other family numbers of Chinese students studying in the United States (Cao 1997). An education psychology student commented:

Visa issues become a salient problem when it comes to paying a short visit. I hope my parents can get a visa to visit me this year, but they have been rejected [by the visa officers] in Beijing again and again. I cried to myself when I felt lonely and helpless. (Participant 16)

When asked why do not go back to China during the summer or winter break, an engineering student explained:

I dare not to go back to China because I am afraid [I] cannot go back the United States again due to the security checks. Last winter, my friend in the chemistry department visited his family in China. His visa application got rejected for several times. Finally, he was too tired to give another try. He decided not to come back to the United States. We all felt pity for him. (Participant 7)

Many Chinese students in the United States dare not to go back to China because they are afraid that they cannot get visas to return once they are in China. Such concern is especially critical for those Chinese students who are majored in engineering, computer programming, biochemistry, and other technology-oriented subjects. As America has increased visa checks, security-type checks, after 9/11, many of them worried that the sensitivity of their majors was a barrier to their visa processing and decided not to go back. It is not uncommon for Chinese students to be able to unable to reunite with parents, husbands, or wives in China during the 3 or 4 years of their sojourn. The long separation from their families poses severe challenges to Chinese students.

Apart from the long separation from the loved ones, respondents' failure to make connections in the new environment also results in their loneliness and homesickness. A biochemistry student stated:

The first semester was extremely challenging. Worst of all, I did not know anyone with whom I could reduce my stress and frustration. I was the only Asian student in my department when I first got here. I shared an apartment with a French guy who was busy and no time or interest to talk to me. My wife was in China and did not really understand how her once confident husband would suddenly have so much pain in school. Friends in China, oh, no. Emotionally I was at my historical lowest point during the first three months. I felt my life was just like solitary confinement, with no one to talk with on campus and no car to leave campus. (Participant 9)

### Pressure from Dating or Marriage

Most Chinese in America are in their late 20s and early 30s. Usually, this is the traditional age range when most first marriages occur. However, Chinese students expressed the anxiety and frustration in finding a Chinese boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife among the limited number of candidates. Female students who would have preferentially involved themselves with Chinese men were not able to do so because the Chinese men failed to take the initiative. A female PhD candidate in her late 30s said:



Chinese men were socially isolated, spent most of their time studying, and had few other interests or recreations. They had few friends and dated very little. They are very shy and reticent. I would like to date a Chinese man, but I am unable to do so because they fail to take the initiative. I certainly can date a Caucasian man but I do not want to do so, because coming from different culture, we have nothing in common. I feel even more stressed as I become older. Believe it or not, age is really problem in the marriage market. (Participant 8)

Different from female students, most Chinese male students were frustrated that they could not find a dream girl in the United States. In most male students' minds, a good girlfriend or wife would be pretty or at least above the ordinary. Additionally, she must be caring and submissive. From the perspective of Chinese male students, most female students in the United States were academically oriented and too manly. A 32-year old male student said:

I feel very frustrated and anxious about the fact that I cannot find my Ms. Right and settle down at this age. As you know, under the pressure of parents and public in China, most Chinese males got married before 30. My parents pushed me to get married as soon as possible, but I cannot find my dream girl here. I feel female students in America are too manly. They bury themselves in the lab or papers, do not know how to cook, rarely dressed up, and always think they should be dominant. Sometimes they are even emotionally stronger and mentally smarter than men are. I would rather bear the loneliness than get married to a female student here. Dating and marriage makes me so frustrated and depressed here. At every night, I asked myself, "Will I be alone till the end of life in America?" (Participant 17)

Differing from those who were still struggling to find their other half, five of the respondents were stressed because of the breakups of their long-distance relationships. A physics student talked about his divorce painfully:

Nothing is secure in America. Life is not secure, work is not secure, [and] family is not secure. My wife broke up [with me] 6 years ago when I first got here. I did not want to quit my doctoral program here which fits my research interest very much, while my wife did not want to give up her decent job in China and stable life to fly over the Pacific Ocean to reunite with me. We both tried hard to persuade each other to give in, but neither side wanted to compromise. I tried my best to keep our marriage, but there was nothing left for us. It was very frustrating for me to feel so hopeless with our marriage. Marriage struggles bring me lots of emotional stress including the lack of concentration, emotional instability, continuous anxiety, and lack of patience. At last, I felt divorce seemed best for us, because I was physically exhausted and emotionally distraught with so much happening. (Participant 13)

In many cases, the life of a student studying abroad is like a survival test for long-distance relationship or marriage. If both sides have designed a similar blueprint for their future, or either side would like to compromise, love or marriage will likely continue; however, if neither side can comprise, the relationship or marriage will likely fall apart.

An MBA student shared her story:

I had a boyfriend in China, and we have been together more than 4 years. We had even been engaged before I came to the United States. One day, he suddenly gave me a call and said that he is unable to bear the long-distance relationship anymore and he wanted to end it. I do not know how to describe my feelings at the moment I heard his words. I felt the sky in my world had collapsed. For many days, I did not eat, drink, or talk to anyone, but lay in the bed

staring at the ceiling crying all day and all night. I was so depressed and frustrated that I almost lost 20 pounds within 1 month. I could not fully describe how I spent those blue days. (Participant 1)

For most Chinese students, the love or marriage in America is difficult to achieve and easily falls apart. Long-time separation, long distance, limited candidates, and over academic-oriented and less socially involved characters are all contributing factors.

### Job Opportunities and Visa Problems

Chinese international students identified job opportunities and visa problems as being among their greatest concerns. All of the respondents viewed their F1 student visa as a barrier for their future employment in the United States. Most of them exhibited substantial stress when it came to job opportunities or visa problems. The stress seemed to derive from the anxiety over their future in the United States after graduation.

Based on the transcripts, the F1 visa placed Chinese students in lower and disadvantaged positions of society. They were frustrated about their foreigner identity because, even though they were members of this country, they did not have the status of citizens and lacked those benefits given to permanent residents. A newly arrived student claimed:

Most of us are not sure if we will be able to find jobs, since the immigration regulations really limit our opportunities in many ways, including limited hours for on-campus work and limited work permits after graduation. Of course, we are unable to receive many social services since we are not US citizens or permanent residents of the United States. I just feel that we are in a disadvantaged position for being Chinese foreign students in this country. (Participant 18)

Compared to the worries of newcomers, the pain was more than real for those who had entered the job market. A male student spoke more directly about the pressure he felt to find a job:

As you know, Chinese students are required by immigration regulations to be full-time students in order to maintain our "F" visa (student visa). There are very limited opportunities for us to switch from "F" visa to "H" visa [worker visa]. The only possibility for this switch is to be employed by the federal government as having expertise under the "technical immigrant quota" system. However, few companies would like to support "H" visa for international students, since the process is money consuming. I already sent out more than five hundred resumes in the last five months, but only got two phone interviews. They never contacted me again, after they knew my status is "F1." (Participant 7)

A finance student talked about her stressful and painful experiences:

It has been a frustrating journey in terms of job searching. No one can feel my stress unless one has gone through the same or similar struggle. Six years ago, when I got my master's degree in environmental engineering, I figured I really could do something in the United States with all the formal training I'd received both in China and in the United States. Unexpectedly, I could not even land a job in 2002 when American job market was so tight

that even lot of American lost their jobs, [let alone] a foreigner. To keep my F1 status, I had no choice but to go back to the university again. I changed my major to economics because I was lured by the stories of quick employment and fast money. [I] got my second master's degree in 2004 and jumped into the job market again. However, I found a master's degree in economics was nothing at that moment, especially for a student who came from China without any hands-on working experiences in economic area. Facing being rejected again and again, I felt confused, surprised, depressed, anxious, and strained. I could not fall asleep every night because there was so much on my mind to worry about such as: Can I find my a job before my visa (OPT) expires? Will any company support an H1 visa? What if the technical quota has been used up when a company finally decides to support an H1 for me? I had no choice but began to apply for master degree in statistics, given that statistics was regarded as most prosperous at that time and Americans are relatively underrepresented in this major. I hope this might help me maximize the opportunity for future employment in the United States. I graduated with the third master degree in statistics in 2006. Disappointedly again, statistics degrees have swamped the job market. I knew this time I could at least got a job if I lowered my salary goal. But I did not want to do so, because I felt I am not given credit for the expense and hardships I endured to get my education. My hard work did not pay off. So, I decided to pursue my PhD in finance and got accepted in 2006. I hope this is my final degree. I am already over 30 and really tired of schooling. (Participant 4)

In addition to difficulties in finding a job and changing F1 visas to H1, some Chinese students had to change their majors frequently or delay their graduation dates again and again in order to maintain an F1 status. A physics student said:

I think I would have graduated two years ago if I were an American or had a green card in hand. Because no one would like to support an H1 visa, I am unable to land a job. Then I had to postpone my graduation again and again in order to maintain my F1 visa. I feel so depressed and frustrated about the fact that I have been here for seven years for my PhD degree. I am ashamed of myself. I am a loser. (Participant 13)

Seeing and hearing about people unable to find a job or losing their jobs, most Chinese students in this study demonstrated a strong feeling of insecurity. An environmental engineering student claimed:

My most critical concern is whether there is a future for a Chinese international student in this society. I do not know why I have always felt very insecure since the first day of my arrival in the United States. There are no guarantees and anything is possible: Say, you can lose everything and be deprived of legal status overnight. (Participant 14)

Comparing China and the United States, students attributed their insecurity to the uncertainty and fear of this unknown country. A sociology student said:

I had never such a feeling in China where I knew at least I could get a decent job and make a middle class living as long as I got an advanced degree. At home, we know where the bottom line is. However, I cannot predict or know exactly how bad my future is when it comes to my life in the United States. To make things even worse, we do not have any resources to back us up or assist us when bad things happen. (Participant 2)

An organizational behavior student said:

The stress, here, let's say, mainly resulted from the feelings of insecurity. You know, the jobs when we are back in China may not have been challenging or high paying or even not what we had been trained for, but at least they were secure, low in demand and often relaxing. Life back there may not have been really exciting, but it was, after all, easy and

carefree. Here in the United States, however, things are totally different. There are no longer secure jobs or homes. (Participant 12)

## Financial Pressure

Ten of my respondents identified that financial concern is a continuing severe problem. A social justice student in stated:

A big problem is financial concern. I did not get any financial support from my department. I lived on the edge each day with so much fear and stress. I have so many things to worry. Do I have enough money to pay the rent? Do I have money to buy the food, books, clothes, and groceries, etc.? My stress level increased as the bills piled up. I felt so stressed sometimes that I wanted to buy a one-way ticket to go back to China without finishing my doctoral study here. But I cannot even afford the airfare to return to China. (Participant 19)

An industrial engineering student talked about his anxiety and frustration because of the sudden financial nightmare:

I received full financial support in the United States from my advisor. But my boss told me she will be unable to support me any longer at the beginning of this semester due to the budget cut. This resulted in a sudden financial nightmare. My temper was bad and my emotion was very unstable. I would be quiet and suddenly yell at others. I would feel that it was easy for me to lose my temper, and I also felt blue, worried, and stressed. I tried my best to seek assistantships from other professors but in vain. I calculated all the money I have, which is barely enough to go through this semester, let alone one more. So, I decided to graduate earlier. This means I will take four courses this semester and finish up my dissertation by this summer. I buried myself between these two responsibilities. It is very hard to go through this financial struggle. (Participant 10)

Unable to secure an assistantship or scholarship, respondents in current study either choose to finish their study as soon as possible, or seek an off-campus job, even if it is illegal to do so. An electrical engineering student talked about his gloomy experiences:

I did not get any financial support in the first year when I got here. I slept on the floor of my friend's room, looking out of the window into the gray sky, my mind [went] a total blank. My luggage remained packed, because I was planning on moving out in 2 days. I had been searching for a job around the campus and had even walked as many blocks as I could, asking whether they need a waiter, [but] all in vain. They all needed a work permit, which I do not have. I had also searched for a cheap place to live, but the rent was so high that I could not afford. All the money I had in my pocket was not even for two weeks' rent. Besides, I had to pay the tuition for the coming semester. I desperately need money. This desperate need for money kept torturing me until I located a job in a local Chinese restaurant. However, the restaurant owner paid me very low, because he knew I am an illegal worker. (Participant 7)

Due to limited financial resources, many Chinese students live a modest life. They often fail to purchase adequate health and automobile insurance. Consequently, they are in a desperate situation in the event of illness or accident. A political science student said:

I tried to save each penny for the tuition and rent. I only eat vegetables and rice to avoid expensive food that has more balanced nutrition. Studies, daily stress, and malnutrition eventually resulted in my sickness. If I get a serious disease without medical insurance in the United States, it will be just like the end of world for me. (Participant 3)

Financial problems were of the greatest concern for Chinese students. Respondents in my study all indicated that they chose a university based on how much financial aid they could receive rather than on the academic reputation of the particular institution. When asked what they would do if their current programs did not have any financial support, twelve of them responded that they would consider changing their majors to another where financial aid was available, regardless of the relevance of the new major to their personal research interests or background. A chemistry student said:

How much I envy American students who can freely choose the major they liked. As a Chinese international student, all I can do is to choose those major wherever financial aid is available. I cannot change to a major like electrical engineering or computer science which I like so much, because I cannot find any financial support in those majors. Money is everything here. (Participant 18)

A bioengineering student supported:

Life here is really hard, especially for Chinese students. The only way out here is to get and secure the financial aid from the department or the professors. For most of the Chinese students, the availability of the financial support rather than the academic reputation is the first concern while choosing American universities and programs to study. In many cases, people come and go simply because of the financial aid. (Participant 17)

## **Sociocultural Concerns**

Sociocultural concerns include the following categories: (a) interactions with Americans, (b) language deficiency, and (c) value clash.

### **Interactions with Americans**

Although a majority of the respondents agreed that most Americans were nice and friendly, quite a few indicated that the friendliness was somewhat superficial. It was difficult for them to develop a “close friendship” with an American, because they always kept a distance between friends. A computer science student claimed:

I felt that the friends here were not as “iron” as the friends in China. In China, in the circle of “iron brothers,” we always look after one another and do “special” favors for each other. Also, as friends, we know what occurred in each other’s life. There is not any secret among Chinese friends. In America, things go totally different. It seems to me that Americans emphasize privacy, and, even among the best friends, the distance is kept. (Participant 15)

A female student echoed:

You can feel that your American colleagues are polite and friendly to you, and you are trying to respond in the same way. But no matter how hard you try, you still feel somehow there's something missing in that polite and friendly atmosphere around you that makes you feel the distance. There seems to be something that stands between you and everybody else, and it prevents you from becoming one of them. You may have many friends, but few "true" friends. (Participant 4)

From Chinese students' opinions, American people tend to be much more individualistic. Their emphasis on privacy often prevents them from establishing intimate friendships. In most Chinese students' minds, the concept of "friendship" referred to two things. On the one hand, friends are supposed to do something special for each other; on the other hand, friends should know each other's business. The Chinese concept of "friendship" is closely related to "connections" or "*guanxi*" (Frank 2000). To Chinese, the "friends' network" is very reliable and effective when help is needed. In contrast to the Chinese concept of friendship, Americans hold quite different expectations regarding what friends should do. To Americans, friendship is not typically based on exchanging favors. Because Americans did not treat friends in the same way as Chinese do, Chinese students might not have gotten the help they expected from their American friends. They were confused, frustrated, and depressed. An industrial engineering student complained:

I know an American guy. He is my neighbor. I think we got along very well. [We] watched football, played tennis, went to bar, things like that. I treated him like my buddy. Last semester, I needed to have someone proofread my term paper. So I asked him for help. His response made me shocked. He said "Wow, 15 pages! Well, buddy, each page, five dollars. The total is 75. I can give you a discount: 50 bucks." I am kind of speechless at that moment. In China, when we do our friends a favor, we never look for money, because the friendship is much more important than money. However, it seems to me that Americans do not easily offer help without monetary gain or other interests. In their minds, friends are friends, but business is business. (Participant 10)

Besides differences in their concepts of friendship, interpersonal relations in America also posed a challenge for most of the respondents. Chinese students came from a more hierarchical society and were sensitive to others' evaluations of them. Chinese students' sense of self-esteem faced a great challenge, because American people were much more direct in asserting their opinions. An educational psychology student talked to me about her unpleasant experience as a teaching assistant:

I feel it is hard to be accepted totally in this society because of my appearance and foreign accent. I have a prominent accent, and some American students cannot bear my accent. I can sense that some of them do not like me at all. When they were forced to listen to my lecture, they showed annoyed or irritated faces. I felt humiliated, embarrassed, and stressed. I cannot change my accent or my appearance. I feel it will not be an easy task for me to be accepted in this country. (Participant 16)

In China, indirectness is known as one of the major Confucian virtues. Growing up in China, these Chinese students inevitably acquired these traditional values. Most of them had learned to be careful and considerate in what they said or how

they spoke to others. Direct confrontation should be avoided at all costs. Therefore, when facing Americans' direct criticism, Chinese students were frustrated, stressed, and confused. One sociology graduate student described a clash between her and an American faculty member:

I have faced a lot of pressure from my coursework, and I feel even more stress because of my experience in the department. Before I came here, all of my information about America was from Hollywood movies, which had a tendency to over-idealize American society. I felt very frustrated and disheartened when I found the disparity between my expectation and the reality. For instance, when I first got here, my department assigned me work as a research assistant for a professor. I thought I already did my best, but she seemed not very satisfied. She did not talk to me directly but wrote a letter to my department chair and my advisor suggesting the department should not support me anymore, because she thought I was not qualified. I was shocked when my advisor told me what she did to me. I do not know how to describe my feelings, embarrassed, humiliated, insecure, frustrated, and anxious. Later on, I found out she had a reputation for being mean to students in my department. So, most of students did not take her words seriously. But back then, I felt my future in America would be ended by what she did. I was so stressed that I cried at night. (Participant 2)

A music graduate student concurred:

I live with an old American lady in her house. We do not get along very well. I have to wash my clothes by myself, because the washer and dryer could ruin my dress. You know, since my major is piano performance, lots of my professional dress is so expensive and I do not want to take the risk. However, my landlord hates me using water to wash clothes. She said she has to pay extra money for water I used. Many times, she is so angry when she saw I washed my clothes. I feel so guilty although I paid the half rent. I dare not to wash my clothes when she is at home as well. (Participant 12)

Owing to the different cultural norms and their lack of English proficiency, most respondents felt great difficulty in interacting with American people. Eight participants indicated that they did not have any social contact or sense of friendship with Americans. They mentioned that most American people with whom they interacted were elderly people, such as landladies, missionaries and Christians, or their host family. They felt frustrated that they had very few or no "peer" American friends. As one student pointed out, "Although I have ample opportunities to see Americans on campus, actual communication with them is rather rare" (Participant 9). Ties with the home world were lost, and new ones were difficult to make. They felt lonely, isolated, and anxious because of the lack of social effectiveness.

### Language and Culture Deficiency

Chinese students identified language problems as a major adjustment problem. Two areas were identified by Chinese students as providing the most difficulties: listening comprehension and oral communication. As for listening comprehension, especially when they first arrived in the United States, the majority of the respondents felt that Americans spoke so fast that it was impossible for them to follow. An

accounting student recalled how he felt about American speaking when he first got here:

Americans rush everywhere, they rush in their talking too, and so have little patience to wait for me to understand, or do not adjust their speaking so I may follow conversation. (Participant 6)

Apart from high-speed talking, a public administration student attributed the listening problems to a “cultural deficiency”:

You know, somehow, I feel it is hard for Chinese students to fit into American society. It is okay for us to study or work here, because academic and working settings are kind of standard environments; people do not use slang very often. For me, I think I can handle classroom discussions, but I do feel stressful when I chat with my American friends. I am overwhelmed by the rich and living English idioms and slang. Because of lack of contextual knowledge, I [am] frequently lost in their talking. There are lots of subtleties I cannot understand. (Participant 11)

Lack of background knowledge impaired the ability of Chinese students to fully understand their American friends' topics of conversation. A male bioengineering student stated:

In many cases, I think [my listening] problem was not always due to the language itself. You know, the most frustrating thing [is that] I know every word being said, but do not have any clue about what the speaker meant. I can give you an example. I was working on my master's degree at the University of Chicago, and I used to live in the area known for its poverty, chaos, and murder. Several of my friends warned me that they were robbed when they returned to their apartments at night. I was kind of scared when walking alone at night. One day, after I watched a football game at the campus stadium, it was so late at night that nobody was on the road. I was in a good mood that night, because our school team won. So I even forgot what my friend told me until a Black guy suddenly approached me. He looked very excited and said, “Hi, buddy, give me five.” I was so scared at that moment that I found five dollars and handed it to him. The guy looked sort of astonished and did not accept the five bucks. He smiled and ran away. Later on, I realized there is a big difference between “give me five” and “give me five dollars.” However, at that moment, although I knew each word “give,” “me,” and “five,” I had no clue about what “give me five” meant. (Participant 17)

Most of the respondents indicated that they had little knowledge about American people, culture, society, and their way of life. Therefore, they had difficulties understanding conversations when it came to topics such as sports, movies, TV dramas comedies, and pop music. A biochemistry student commented:

Since I had never watched a football or baseball game in China, I had no way of knowing its rules. I looked dumb when my American friends talked about sports. Since American people assume us Chinese students understand the terms, events, and places in the same way as normal Americans do, they refer to a lot of things without explanation. However, what is presumably common knowledge to American people is pretty new to me. Just as a newborn baby, I got lost very often in this new environment. I do not know how many years it will take me to reach their standard in terms of background knowledge. It is so tough. (Participant 9)

In terms of speaking, there typically were three problems associated with Chinese students. They include accurately pronouncing English words, using appropriate words, and speaking English fluently. An MBA student said:



To me, English was a big hurdle. I had a strong accent, which makes American people unable to understand what I said. When I talked to American people, they often misunderstood. It was okay when people could not fully understand me in daily conversations. However, a strong accent was a big hurdle to me when I was doing a telephone interview with a potential employer. Most of them felt it was difficult to communicate with me in English, and therefore I was kicked off even in the first round by most of interviewers. [I am] so frustrated about this. I do not know how long it will take me to get rid of my accent. (Participant 1)

Besides their accent, some of the respondents found it difficult to find an appropriate word or formulate a correct sentence, which inhibited effective communication with Americans. As a social justice student stated:

It is difficult for me to find appropriate words to express myself when it comes to topics such as arts, philosophy, movies, and humanities. Some words I want to say, I cannot remember. Or I do not know the real translation of the word or how to express that meaning. For instance, I remembered an American classmate once asked me what *feng shui* is. As all Chinese know, *feng shui* is sort of traditional Chinese term. It took me 1 h to explain *feng shui* to him, but he still seemed confused. His confusion largely resulted from my awkward oral communication. The same thing happened when I was asked to explain the difference between two philosophy traditions, Confucian and Taoism. (Participant 5)

For most of the respondents, the reason for their poor listening and oral communication skills was thought to be directly related to the language environment in China where people rarely get the opportunity to interact with people whose native language is English.

## Values Clash

### *Aggressiveness Versus Humbleness*

One area where there was a clash in values regards aggressiveness versus humbleness. In China, preserving the social harmony is the foremost goal of society. Obedience, patience, restraint, and forbearance are all considered virtuous characteristics for an individual to have. Efforts to achieve individual goals are often regarded as inappropriate, and attempts to show off a person's capabilities or importance normally perceived as presumptuous or arrogant (Li 1993). Humbleness and modesty are stressed repeatedly in the Chinese way of life. However, once they were in American land, students found their habitual humbleness and modesty sometimes brought them undesirable consequences. A bioengineering student disclosed:

I think Chinese traditional values, such as humbleness, restraint, or forbearance, have no use here. Americans will look down upon you, if you do that. Last semester, I wanted to take a course, and I talked to the professor who taught the course. When we met, he asked: "How good are you in bacteriology?" "Just so-so," I responded in a Chinese traditional humble manner. He then added, "My course is very difficult and only super smart students can pass it. I think you'd better not take it, otherwise, you might get C or D in my class." I do not know why he perceived me as so lacking of talented and incapable. You know I never took his class before. Later on, I think it might be because of my low-profile

personality and humble attitude, which is so valued in China but does not work in America. However, back then, I was unable to figure out why I, an overachiever through years, had become a stupid person in an American professor's eyes. I felt so hurt, painful, and frustrated. I cried the whole night. I insisted on taking this course, but I felt so stressed and I experienced emotional instability during that semester. I was haunted by his words. In many instances, I went to bed and I could not fall asleep once I thought that I might get C or D in this course. It was a terrible experience, even though I got an A in the end. (Participant 17)

The influence of traditional Chinese values produced another problem for Chinese students when it came to job searching—that is, how to sell themselves. Ten of the respondents indicated that in America, where one has to sell oneself largely on one's own, individuals have to depart from traditional humbleness and be more aggressive. An MBA student revealed:

In China, we have no experience in selling ourselves. Chinese culture does not encourage people do the “selling.” Anyone who openly publicizes his or her personal achievement would be considered overaggressive, whereas, in America, you have to be aggressive and show all you have to convince the employer you are the best among all the candidates. I learned this from my own internship experiences at IBM. When I did my internship at IBM last summer, I was assigned to collaborate on a project with another intern from India. To tell the truth, this Indian guy did not contribute a lot to our project. He neither showed up on time when we met, nor completed the part he was supposed to finish. Since the deadline was coming, I could not wait for him but finished the project largely on my own. What he did only accounted for 10 percent of the final project. However, when we presented our project to those managers in charge, the Indian guy suddenly changed to a totally different person: active, aggressive, capable, you name it. He bragged about what he did this and that in this project, how he went all out to get through this project. He tried his best to convince IBM managers that he contributed a lot in this project, that he knew everything about this project, and that he would be the best candidate if there was an opening. In a 1-hour presentation, he talked about 50 min and left me only 10 min. The way he pretended to be the main contributor in this project really pissed me off. However, a month later, I found out he beat me and finally won the IBM position. I learned a lot from him. He might not be a good employee, but he definitely knew how to sell himself. As a Chinese, I am taught that a real knowledgeable person would only show 50%, if he or she has 100%. However, in America, I think that you should show all you have, even brag some about what you could do in order to get a potential position. Otherwise, people take your humbleness as lack of capabilities, lack of talent, lack of confidence, or lack of communication skills. (Participant 1)

### *Manual Labor Versus Mental Intellectuals*

Another area where there was a clash in values regards manual labor versus mental intellectuals. For well-educated Western youths, experiences with low-paid, part-time jobs can be associated with economic independence. However, manual labor is totally uncustomary and unpleasant for many well-educated Chinese students. In America, facing financial difficulties, Chinese students, especially those self-funded Chinese students, had to work to support their studies. However, finding a decent job in America was anything but easy for Chinese students. Chinese students encountered two major problems. On the one hand, as discussed earlier, because the US government regulations did not allow international students to seek off-campus employment, law-abiding employers dared not hire Chinese students; on the other

hand, Chinese students' limited communication could not convince potential on-campus employers that they were right for the job. Circumscribed by these factors, most Chinese students generally settled for the low-paying manual jobs. Many of these jobs were undesirable or unwanted by American workers. Most of them ended up taking jobs as waiters or waitresses in Chinese restaurants.

Respondents described their physical and psychological stress of working in Chinese restaurants. A political science student said:

You cannot imagine how unbearable [working in Chinese restaurant is] if you did not go through it yourself. Since the restaurant owner knew Chinese students needed money and had to work illegally, they treat us like slaves and make us work to our full limit. The owner told me that I should not stop working for a minute as long as I was in the restaurant. My major responsibility is to cut vegetables and slice meat. I had to cut up all the vegetables and slice the meat when the cook needs them. Once the cutting job was done, I needed to make thousands of dumplings. We had only 30 min for lunch. Except for these 30 min, I have to keep working and running like a machine. By the time I got home, I could not even raise my arms. My back was in such pain and I could not even lie down in the bed. (Participant 3)

To some extent, physical pain is something to which one can adjust with relative ease. What is hard for Chinese students to bear is the psychological pressure resulting from social status loss and intellectual worthlessness. A public administration student said:

I worked in a restaurant on the weekends last year. Recalling those days, there was a lot of pressure in my life. In China, I worked as a journalist for a well-known newspaper. I had a fairly high social status. But here, I feel I am at the bottom of society. Most of my coworkers were uneducated illegal immigrants. The things they talked about were vulgar. Being with these people made me feel inferior too. When I worked in a small darkened kitchen and heard dirty jokes, I felt devastated and hopeless. Besides the loss of social status, I felt doing the job was a waste of time. I am supposed to come to the United States to pursue my doctoral degree, not to work as a waitress. When I was cutting veggies, or washing dishes, I felt empty and disappointed. I dared not tell my parents where I worked. They would lose their minds. (Participant 11)

In China, it was believed that educated people should not engage in any physical jobs. An educated person should use his mind not his body. In Chinese culture, only those uneducated have to do manual labor to make a living. The ancient doctrine had, consciously or unconsciously, influenced many Chinese students' views. For many of them, working outside an educational setting was commonly considered physically and psychologically unpleasant, intellectually worthless, and even socially demeaning.

The reactions toward manual labors were not all negative. Especially when they looked back, most of them saw the positive aspects of doing manual labors to support their study. Just as a student stated:

I did not feel much survival pressure when I was in China, since I was always taken care of by my parents. However, my parents were unable to support me financially anymore once I came to the United States, due to the wide gap between the income level of China and that of the United States and also as the result of low exchange rate of Chinese *Yuan* to the US dollar. Without any backup resources, I have to depend on myself to make a living. After

tasting the difficulty in landing a job, I began to take a second look at my ability to survive and how much I am worth. I began to realize that being a nerd bookworm in an ivory tower is not enough for an adult. How to increase your market value and achieve financial independence should be given high priority as well. Accompanying this, my attitude toward life changed as well. I realized that I was too aloof and conceited before. I did not value what I got and complained a lot. After doing the manual labors in America, I know life is not easy at all. When each dollar you pay is earned by yourself, you know how to appreciate life. You feel grateful for what you have. (Participant 10)

## Academic Concerns

There are three subcategories to the academic concerns: (a) language, (b) achievement, and (c) interaction with faculty.

### Language

Students spoke about the added pressure that being a nonnative English speaker placed on them. A male accounting student recalled his first year's stressful experiences:

When I first came here, I could not follow what the professors were saying in the seminar. During 3 h of the seminar, I did not know what to do or what to say, just like a retarded person. After each class, I had to borrow my classmates' notes to catch up. I had so many things on my mind. There was no way for me to go out and relax. I had to stay at home to work on those materials I missed in class and try to learn by myself what the professor taught that day. The language pressure was so heavy in that first semester that my hair fell out frequently. (Participant 6)

A social justice student concurred:

Since my major is social justice, we have a lot of class discussions and presentations. I truly had difficulty speaking in class because of the language barrier. I am not good at speaking English. It was not easy for me to participate in the discussion. I felt stressed before class and frustrated and depressed after class. No one can understand how I felt sitting in class unable to say anything. I dared not to open my mouth except once because of the encouragement of the professor. I tried to make it clear but it seems no one understood what I was trying to talk about. All of my classmates looked so confused. At that moment, I felt so embarrassed and humiliated that I wished I could escape from the classroom immediately. There was so much stress, frustration, and sorrow. So many times, I cried like a crybaby at home. I felt so helpless and powerless. (Participant 5)

Besides listening and speaking problems, academic papers also pose a problem especially for those students whose majors are in the humanities and social sciences. An organizational behavior student commented:

In the department where I study, graduate students need to write tons of papers: memos, term papers, presentation papers, and final papers. If this is a lot of work for American students, it almost makes me lose my breath. As you know, unlike informal speaking where the usage of words does not have to be precise, academic writing requires words and

sentences to be used in the exact way they should be. Since most of my papers were going to be read by professors who are normally very critical, I could hardly ever get away with mistakes. Many times, what I got from my professors is just, “please redo it” or “your writing is so confusing and I did not get what you want to say.” Even after I revised a paper, I dared not to give my professors, because I was afraid of being rejected again. I could not count how many times I grabbed my paper and cried in the bedroom. I was so sad, stressed, frustrated, and depressed. (Participant 19)

A public administration student reported:

I concentrated as much as I could on my coursework, but it was much harder than I expected since my native language is not English. Several of my course professors told me to find a tutor and have them correct my papers. I was so sad because it took me many nights working on my reports. It was not easy for me to face this kind of frustration since I had always been a remarkable student. I did spend more days on the next assignment, but my professors gave me the same suggestion. I was sad, fearful and did not know what to do because I worried that professors would tell me the same things. I could not share my feelings to my parents in China. They would think I did not try my best. I just swallowed everything and became very depressed. My papers simply were not good enough. I continued to receive B or C grades. I also began to perform poorly on exams for fear of failure and extreme nervousness. (Participant 11)

In terms of those factors leading to their language barrier, three of my respondents indicated that they habitually organize in Chinese and then translate it to English with little consideration of how the Americans would express the same idea. Just as a student stated:

Chinglish expressions are frequently used in my writing and professors feel my papers are very awkward. I do not know how to get rid of Chinglish expressions. (Participant 16)

Four of my respondents attributed their language barrier to the lack of training in China. A female student stated:

The language training most of us once accepted often failed to adequately help us to meet the academic demands of our programs. Other than a relatively small portion of students whose major was English in Chinese universities, most Chinese students have little systematic training in the English language, especially in speaking and writing in the language. While in China, a non-English-speaking environment, the preparation for English academic writing for most Chinese students was obviously inadequate. Furthermore, once Chinese students arrived in the United States, most of us started our graduate programs immediately without any additional training in speaking or writing in English. (Participant 3)

Chinese students usually worry that their actual performances on all kinds of tests will be crippled by their English proficiency. A biochemistry student recalled his extremely stressful experience of preparing for a speaking test in order to become a TA:

Since I am not a native speaker, I must pass the speaking test to work as a teaching assistant. It only has been 3 months since I was here, and I am still not confident about my spoken English. The preparation for the speaking test, and the fear of failure, resulted in high level of anxiety and stress. Many nights, I could not sleep at all. I have so many things to worry about. What if I could not get the question raised by the tester? What if the tester is unable to understand my Chinglish? What if I fail this exam? I could not afford to fail the exam,

because there was no chance to make it up until the next semester. I frequently woke up in the middle of the night from nightmares. I dreamed that I failed the speak test and had to drop out of the program due to lack of financial support. I cannot fully describe my fear and stress to you. (Participant 9)

## Achievement

Nearly all of my respondents believe that high academic stress is mainly due to Chinese students themselves who are highly motivated to achieve. Chinese students' critical concerns about academic excellence are rooted in Chinese traditional cultural values, which emphasize education and hard work. Confucian philosophy views education as important for the improvement of job prospects and even more important as a means for building one's character. Influenced by this philosophy, Chinese family values and socialization experiences emphasize the need to succeed educationally. Chinese parents typically attach great importance to their children's academic achievement. Academic success of the child brings a sense of pride and joy to the entire family, while academic failure is perceived as letting one's family down and causing them to lose face (Hui 1988; Stiglar et al. 1985). Growing up in this culture, Chinese students internalized these positive educational values (cultural demand for educational excellence) and take personal responsibility for their own learning. They always strive to succeed in order to make their family happy and proud of them. Even after they come to United States, the pressure to achieve still is firmly retained by Chinese students. Just as an industrial engineering student claimed:

Just like most Chinese students here, I was taught very early in life to work hard and achieve excellence in education. Achievement through effort, hard work, and endurance is highly emphasized both in my family and at school. My parents believe that academic success will ensure a better and more prosperous future and thereby set an extremely high standard for me. They dedicated numerous time, money, and energy to my study. To make my parents happy and proud, I work very hard to ensure I always perform to the best of my abilities on all exams. As a result, I always feel stressed out, especially after I came to United States. I am not sure if I can do as well as before in such a totally unfamiliar academic environment. (Participant 10)

A female student added:

My parents worked very hard and sacrificed much to get me here to continue my higher education in the United States. I owe them so much. The only way I can honor my parents is to study hard and get excellent grades. Hence, I feel exceptional pressure not to fail. (Participant 1)

An electrical engineering student stated:

I studied very hard and devoted most of my time to pursuing degrees in the United States. To me, degrees from American universities not only bring honor to my family at home but also can allow me to have good future job opportunities in the United States or in China. I deeply believe that academic excellence is a requirement for attaining a US degree. I have devoted myself to earning as many As as possible even though some courses are difficult

for foreign students. It is important for me to have an excellent GPA since I believe that a very good GPA is a critical factor for future job hunting in the United States. (Participant 7)

An accounting student concurred:

It is obvious that every Chinese student here knows that education is his or her only hope for social acceptance and financial security. As a result, many of us feel anxiety and stress. With the pressure to excel academically, almost all of us spend endless hours studying. When comparing myself with other Chinese students in terms of educational achievement, I feel even more stressed. (Participant 6)

An educational psychology student stated:

I am overly concerned with my academic performance. If I am accidentally unable to get an "A" in a quiz or a test, I feel overstressed, frustrated, depressed, like it is the end of the world. (Participant 16)

Chinese students are socialized to value education and often consider school work as part of their filial duty (Wilson and Pusey 1982; Stevenson et al. 1986). High parental expectations, the constant pressure to do well in schools, and the fear of failure create extreme feelings of stress and anxiety for Chinese students. In addition, concerns about upward mobility through education also contribute to the high level of stress. A mechanical engineering student summarized:

My academic stress comes from the expectation of my parents, as well as my own demand to look forward to a better tomorrow in America. I hope to have a good career in the United States, and I must maintain a record of academic excellence for my future. (Participant 8)

Facing the strain of language and academic problems, Chinese students feel even more stress if they fail. Because attaining an advanced degree is a major way for Chinese students to achieve higher status in China, or to pursue their dreams in the United States, the potential negative consequences of academic failure are considerable. A female doctoral student in finance stated:

I carried all hopes and expectations from the family and relatives in my hometown to the United States. I told myself that I would bring more honor to my family and to the people who support me. It was the most stressful summer in my life, preparing for the qualifying exam. I studied very hard but still worried so much about whether I would pass. I could not sleep well at night. I was so nervous the first day of my qualifying exams that I sat in the room without being able to write. I felt my brain was a blank even though I had studied hard for months. I tried to push myself to force out some answers for the qualifier questions, but I could not do it. The more I pushed myself, the more my brain turned blank. (Participant 4)

A bioengineering student said:

As a student in a science major, I have to publish three papers in peer-reviewed journals before I get the degree. Otherwise, my job prospects in this country will be bleak. I usually spend at least 12 h each day in the lab to run my experiments. All day and all night, the lab is my home. It takes endless patience to work in the lab. However, the more concerned about my experiment results, the more I become impatient. I get mad very easily after hours of working in the lab. I have no choices. I need to work hard to be able to collect enough data for my papers. However, an experiment is an experiment. There is no guarantee that each experiment will be successful. It is so frustrating when you work 3 months without obtaining any results. I did not smoke at all in China, but I am a heavy smoker right now. I found smoking can make my mind a little bit

peaceful. I hope I will not get sick before finishing the current project, because I feel my breathing becoming more difficult recently. (Participant 17)

A social justice student claimed:

Study stress is a part of life here. Especially for us social science students, life will always be stressful before getting the degree and finding a stable full-time position in the United States. To make myself more competitive in the future job market, I chose to apply to law school, besides pursuing my current PhD study in social justice. As you might know, I have to take LSAT test before I apply. LSAT is so challenging that even American students get headaches about it. Last fall, I spent 3 months preparing for it. I did learn a lot but the stress to get a decent grade is so overwhelming. My current program of study, my teaching assistant duty, and the preparation for the LSAT have given me a lot of stress. It is my hope to finish my schoolwork and TA duties soon to allow myself time to stay at home to focus on preparing for the LSAT. I have spent many sleepless nights preparing for the test and also worrying about what happens if I fail. I feel an emotional drought and physical exhaustion. (Participant 5)

High motivation translates to high standards and high expectations on their academic performance, which accordingly increase stress about their academic life. Furthermore, in order to maintain their previously acquired strong GPAs, students have to work even harder. This makes them even more stressed.

### Interactions with Faculties

Being able to approach professors was identified as very important. This was confirmed by previous research on international students' cross-cultural adjustment. Zimmermann (1996), for instance, argued that international students' academic success depends to a great extent on their interaction with their native instructors. However, intercultural communication is usually inherently problematic and thereby dysfunctional. Four problems were identified by my respondents as factors handicapping their effective interactions with American faculty. They were language insufficiency, lack of initiative and autonomy, verbal passiveness, and indirect mode of communication.

#### *Language Insufficiency*

Interview transcriptions reveal that Chinese students' language insufficiency handicaps their effective communication with their advisors. Just as a public administration student stated:

I felt very stressed talking to my advisor. On one hand, due to limited command of English, I had no idea what topics are appropriate to talk about, how to make some jokes or show a sense of humor like American students do, or how to talk informally yet appropriately; on the other hand, I have difficulty understanding my advisor's jokes or off-topic conversations. I was worried about that my slow responses might make him think that I lacked talent. However, the more I wanted to speak fluently and act smartly, the more awkward and nervous I looked as I talked to him. As a result of overstress, I could not even speak English the way I normally could. (Participant 11)



Due to the language insufficiency, four of my respondents thought that they tend to converse less and even avoid the interaction with their advisors. As a result of insufficient interaction, it is difficult for them to establish a good rapport with their advisors.

Several of my respondents also indicated that their actual academic capability has been crippled by their English proficiency. Due to language deficiency, they failed to produce high-quality research papers, which made their advisors doubt their research abilities. An educational psychology student recalled:

The limited command of English negatively affects my academic performance. The first semester, my advisor even suggested that I quit the doctoral program. He said that he did not see any potential from my papers. He also mentioned that I lack the English language skills necessary to function effectively in the doctoral program. I could not fall asleep at night for a week after he talked to me. I was so stressed, anxious, and frustrated. Everybody knows what it means when your advisor perceives you as incapable of writing a research paper. What he said was just like claiming me to be an academic loser. On the other hand, I felt helpless, powerless, and constrained in the situation. All of my talents and marvelous research ideas were crippled by my poor English. My advisor could not fully understand what I wanted to express, let alone appreciate. In his eyes, I am a student without research talent. I cannot fully describe how hard it was to get through that semester. (Participant 16)

Taken together, lack of language proficiency leads to students' concerns about whether or not their advisors understand them and whether or not their communication is appropriate in the context. In addition, they want their advisors to acknowledge their actual academic capabilities, but they believe it to be crippled by their language deficiency.

### *Teacher's Guidance Versus Self-Directedness*

Transcriptions reveal that Chinese students' lack of initiative and autonomy makes it difficult for them to effectively communicate with their advisors. Participants said that a large portion of the challenge that university education in the United States poses for them was the need to develop considerable self-management and self-discipline. They argued that for most Chinese students who are accustomed to being given strict direction and rigorous discipline in their studies, university education in America definitely presents problems. Just as a sociology student stated:

I feel everything was specified very clearly in China, and rigorous discipline was usually available. However, on American campus it was not very clear what one exactly needed to do or how to proceed step by step to achieve the academic goals. And when I conversed with my advisor about "what my academic future would be" or "how long will I take to complete this doctoral program," the common response is "it is up to you", or "it depends on you." Facing such unclear answers, I felt overwhelmed and stressed because there were so many choices for me which just made me feel lost. Especially the first semester, I wandered around aimlessly without any goal or direction. (Participant 2)

In the American educational system, blind discipline is devalued, and self-directedness is encouraged. Emphasis on individual autonomy accordingly trivializes the relationship between mentors and students (Lieberman 1994; Jin and

Cortazzi 1991). Just as Liberman (1994) observed, "American students are reluctant to be directed by their professors" (p. 180). Or like Weber (1946) who commented, "No young American would think of having the teacher sell him a *Weltanschauung* or a code of conduct" (p. 149). However, this academic culture and mentor-student relationship is certainly not what Chinese students expect. Jin and Cortazzi's study (1991) indicated that students coming from China usually have very high expectations of their advisors (instructors).

They seek guidance from their teachers, who are expected to be moral leaders and social leaders, experts who know everything in their specific area and who can plan for and instruct students. The crucial relationship is that between teacher and student, which is seen in paternalistic terms. The teacher should tell students what is what and how to proceed. The teacher should be sensitive to any student problems and should be helpful in social and everyday issues arising out of daily living. Like a parent, the teacher should care for students academically and socially. (p. 86)

When these Chinese students, well trained in traditional communication styles and teacher-student interaction patterns, come to the United States, they bring this heritage with them onto the American campus, and communication problems occur. Just as a political science student described:

I am not sure what is wrong between my advisor and me. Probably because I was too "Chinese" a Chinese student in an American educational setting, I was accustomed to rely on advisors determining research topics and professional futures, which apparently contradicted with what my advisor thought. Last semester, I needed to determine my dissertation topic and was not sure what to do. So, I kept making appointments with my advisor with the hope to discuss with him. I think this is quite normal and reasonable in China. However, suddenly one day I got his e-mail saying he felt very uncomfortable with my frequent appointments. I was so confused that I could not help ask him why. He told me that a doctoral student is supposed to take initiative in research topic instead of relying on an advisor. Later on, although I had chosen the research topic largely on my own, I was still struggling with how to interact with my advisor. I am still not sure what is appropriate and proper in American communication style and what is not. (Participant 3)

Regarding the independence learning and self-directedness valued in American academic culture, most of my respondents indicated that they are either not trained to learn on their own or do not feel comfortable doing so. In the Chinese system for years, most of my respondents were more or less accustomed to the "authoritarian instruction" of Chinese professors and had a hard time adjusting to the style of lectures by American professors and independent learning style. Just as a bioengineering student claimed:

According to my own observation, students in American universities are expected to study on their own to develop their ability to study independently. Following this educational philosophy, for a majority of American professors, there is no need to include in a lecture everything students are supposed to learn. Or, in some cases, the teacher talks something in class, but you cannot find it in textbook. And you do not know which book to read and where to find the book. The professor does not explain too much to you, and he does not tell you how to study. Most of us Chinese, however, were more or less accustomed to relying on the very detailed lecture style of Chinese professors. As a result, we felt exceptional pressure in adjusting to the independent learning style. (Participant 17)

Acknowledging their lack of initiative and autonomy during their interactions with their advisors, many of participants still expressed a desire for more faculty guidance in the process of socialization into their future profession but were not sure how to initiate a career-related topic or how to approach their advisors. An educational psychology student commented:

As foreign students, we know a little about this country and our future profession. Also, we are prone to misunderstanding and social isolation from Americans. We hope we can get much guidance from faculties regarding the institution and profession. However, we do not know how to initiate a topic or what is the best way to approach an advisor. (Participant 16)

Thus, for Chinese students in this study, enrolling in American universities means not only the nonexistence of their accustomed mentor-student relationship but also unprecedented challenges they have to encounter. That is, to organize their academic work independently and determine their own academic or career future by themselves. Such challenges accordingly bring a sense of being overwhelmed, because they were trained to totally rely on external guidance and discipline for almost 20 years before coming to the United States.

A computer science student summarized their feelings while providing a comparison. He said:

There is a popular comparison to describe the difference between Chinese educational system and its American counterpart. That is, students walk on the earth when studying in China, while they fly in the sky in America. It is true that we get much more freedom once we are enrolled in American system, just as we can enjoy more freedom when flying than walking. However, the psychological trade-off of the academic autonomy and freedom is the constant insecurity and enormous pressure. Most of us Chinese feel overwhelming stress all the time, because everybody knows that it is okay you stop or fall on the ground when you are walking, but you can never afford to stop or fall while flying in the sky. (Participant 15)

### *Silent Learner Versus Active Learner*

Eleven of the Chinese students believe that their habitual silence or culturally verbal passivity, exemplified by a lack of class participation, an avoidance of raising questions, and an avoidance of interaction with faculty, handicapped them in relating to their professors.

Chinese students find it difficult and challenging to adjust to the classroom discussion required in American academia. They are stressed because, on one hand, they are unprepared for the interactive nature of classroom communication and have problems interacting in an American academic setting and, on the other hand, they come from a more hierarchical society and are sensitive to professors' evaluations of them. Chinese students' sense of self-esteem faces a great challenge after they come to the United States. A female finance student stated:

As a typical Chinese student, I do not talk too much in class. However, I found my low-profile personality and humble attitude, which is so valued in Chinese classroom, has been taken by American professors as a lack of talent and an inability in many cases. This makes me feel frustrated, depressed, and stressed. (Participant 5)

Chinese students' silence in the classroom and reluctance to participate in class discussions conflict with American teachers' expectations. In China, as the dispenser of knowledge, the teacher controls the classroom and does not expect student participation or interaction. Educated under the Chinese educational system for many years, students are used to keeping silent and are reluctant to express their opinions publicly. However, the extreme silence that most Chinese students regard as normal classroom behavior is "weird" to American instructional approaches that emphasize the development of students' individual expression, since the typical role of the American teacher is to facilitate rather than to dispense knowledge. Therefore, miscommunication certainly occurs when the conflicting communicative norms clash in the classroom. Such miscommunication heightens the level of stress among most Chinese students, especially when they realize their status as "isolated" or "marginalized" during class discussions. They are afraid that their role as "outsiders" will leave a bad impression on the instructor. As an MBA student claimed:

Probably because I got used to the teacher-centered schema, I really would like to keep silent and do not want to participate in the discussion. However, I feel stressed, since I know my silence probably will hurt my final grade which is decided by our American instructors who usually expect students to open their mouths in class. (Participant 1)

A sociology student agreed:

In China, the student's role is to absorb knowledge, and the expected stance is passivity. Chinese teachers will praise us for our silence in classrooms. American instructors, in contrast, take silence and passivity as lack of initiative or lack of passion to learn. They value self-expression and self-confidence so much that students who don't participate in the discussions are not welcomed. Observing this makes me feel nervous and anxious all the time in the classroom, because I am bad at speaking up, but it seems that I have to push myself to do so just to make a good impression. (Participant 2)

Miscommunication occurs as well when it comes to raising questions. On one hand, American professors rely heavily upon students' questions as an instructional medium. It was thought that by asking questions, students can better understand the subject matter. On the other hand, Chinese students are accustomed to following the Chinese practice of attempting to think about problems on their own instead of asking professors in the classroom. Typical Chinese students' perceptions on "raising questions" are quoted below. A chemistry student mentioned:

What is important for Chinese students in classroom is that the learners master the content, through diligence and patience, without questioning or challenging what is presented by teachers. Indeed, in China, questioning by students is quite often seen to be disruptive to the instruction process and not respectful of the teacher. (Participant 18)

A physics student stated:

Chinese students usually work out a problem by themselves. If we still could not figure out how to solve it even though we tried hard, we would choose to ask other Chinese students instead of approaching professors with problems by taking advantage of office hours. This is because we do not want to suggest that the instructor had not been very clear. (Participant 13)

Inhibited by their habitual thinking, Chinese students are usually reluctant to raise questions in class, which is far beyond the expectation of American instructors. In most cases, American professors regard Chinese students' passivity as lacking motivation to learn or lacking ability to think independently. On the other hand, Chinese students can't help feeling stressed, when seeing their behavior is out of place in the classroom or conflicts with the teachers' expectation. As a public administration student disclosed:

You can imagine how stressed I am, when various professors asked me the same question, "how come you keep extremely silent in the seminar and never raise questions? Are you not very interested with my topic or does my class bore you?" Facing this question for millions of times, I realized the instructors regard me as an "outsider." This negative impression would definitely hurt my GPA. (Participant 11)

To sum up, habitual silence or verbal passiveness is the manifestation of Chinese students' education socialization in Chinese culture, which emphasizes the authority or social harmony. Trained in this type of education socialization, Chinese students experienced considerable stress when it comes to oral presentation, discussion participation, or even raise questions.

### *Indirectness Versus Directness*

Most of my respondents indicated that they were inclined to be indirect in order to preserve harmony in interactions with their professors or advisors. Following traditional Chinese communicative rules, they tend to use vague language, rich in hints, and indirect requests when communicating with their professors. They never demand, refuse, or criticize their professors in a straightforward manner. They found, however, that in some cases, their indirectness hindered their relationship with American advisors or supervisors. Just as a biochemistry student commented:

I found sometimes, our habitual indirectness might leave advisors the impression that we are incapable of being well organized or getting to the point. (Participant 9)

An organizational behavior student concurred this by offering her own experience:

At the beginning of this semester, my advisor assigned me a project which needed some advanced statistics skills. To tell the truth, I did not know how to do it, but I dared not to tell him at that moment but just asked him several small questions. You know, in Chinese culture, everything the professors assigned us is reasonable, and we are not supposed to refuse. I tried my best to work on it, but I failed to figure it out. I did not make any progress in 2 months. One day, he asked me how far I went with this project. I had no choice but tell him that I am not good at statistics and I probably need to take some courses first in order to finish the project. He was so mad and said: "why do not you tell me earlier and now we waste a lot of time. I am serious. Next time, tell me if you have any problems with the job and don't beating around the bush." (Participant 19)

Another engineering student had similar experience:

I have been highly stressed lately because I am worried I am going to lose my current RA position. My boss sent me an e-mail several days ago saying he was very disappointed with

my job progress and he is considering taking my assistantship away and giving it to a more capable student. I dared not to tell him that I am not very sure what he wanted me to do from the very beginning when he assigned this job. I pretended to know what he meant when, actually, I did not. I had thought to just figure it out myself rather than ask my professor, my boss, for assistance. I tried hard indeed but eventually screwed everything up. It is stressful to think that he will fire me. (Participant 17)

Due to Chinese students' indirectness, miscommunication frequently happens during the work interaction between Chinese TA or RA and their American supervisors (advisors). The typical scenario is just as an accounting student summarized:

On one hand, professors assign us projects and never give detailed instructions. On the other hand, most Chinese students rarely ask for clarification with the faculty in spite of encountering many problems in their TA or RA jobs. (Participant 6)

When asked the reason for Chinese students' unwillingness to present problems to their advisors, most of respondents attribute to the Chinese culture which values those workers with fewer problems as more intelligent and hardworking. Chinese students' willingness to demonstrate their effort and devotion to work, however, has exactly the opposite effect on their supervisors.

The indirect communication style also influences the degree of Chinese students' acceptance of open and direct criticism. Most of them perceived explicit criticism to be associated with low capability, insufficient effort, or failure. Clashes occur especially when Chinese students are unable to complete their task as neat as expected by American supervisors due to their lack of preliminary knowledge of working procedures. On one hand, American faculty are unaware of the very serious obstacles encountered by Chinese students who strive to efficiently perform and therefore perceive the inefficiency as lack of cooperation or lack of work ethic. On the other hand, Chinese students think they are already trying their best to work, while their supervisors seem far from satisfied. Due to this failure to communicate, professors get upset or even sometimes express their criticism directly. Such criticism consequently makes Chinese students feel difficult to accept. A mechanical engineering student complained:

To avoid bothering my boss, I tried my best to complete my job relying on myself. I never told her how many problems I met and how tough this job is. However, she still is very picky and always criticizes me as inefficient and ineffective and totally ignores the effort that I devoted to this job. Her inconsideration and overdemanding make me highly stressful. (Participant 8)

Since "culture is largely responsible for the construction of our individual social realities and for our individual repertoires of communicative behaviors and meanings" (Porter and Samovar 1994, p. 348), Chinese students' indirect mode of communication frequently clashes with American faculties' directive mode, and miscommunication occurs when Chinese students do not conform to pragmatic and linguistic expectations as defined by majority group norms.

## Summary of Stressors

Interview participants identified their stressors come mainly from three areas: (1) personal concerns, (2) sociocultural stress, and (3) academic pressure.

Their personal stress sources are mainly from dating or marriage problems; visa status, job opportunities, or immigration concerns; financial strain; and homesickness and loneliness. They are frustrated and depressed about their foreign student visa status, which not only puts them in a disadvantageous position in many ways while being students but also gives them substantial stress when it comes to their future job opportunities and immigration in America. Regarding the marriage or relationship, they feel impotent about the fact that the love or marriage in America easily falls apart and is difficult to achieve due to the factors such as long-distance relationship, long-time separation, limited candidates, over-high expectations, and more academic-oriented and less extroverted characters. Financial strains give students a lot of restraints socially and academically. Socially, they have to live a frugal life. Academically, financial aid limits students' choices, and they have to give the highest priority to the assistantships rather than personal interests when it comes to choosing universities or majors. Marginal syndrome, accompanied by loneliness and longing for home and identity, is pervasive among Chinese students and make their sojourn painful.

As for sociocultural stressors, students are concerned about the difficulty in interacting, communicating, and building friendships with Americans. According to students, their social deficiency is caused either by their own cultural or language deficiencies or by the conflicting values between America and China.

Academic stress is extremely high for most students in this study, because they are highly motivated to achieve academic success. Facing the strain of language and academic problems, they feel even more stressed if they fail. Because attaining an advanced degree is a major way for Chinese students to achieve higher status in China, or to pursue their dreams in the United States, the potential negative consequences of academic failure are considerable. Also, interactions with American faculty pose severe challenges for most Chinese students. Culture and education disparities between China and America, together with Chinese students' language deficiencies, contribute to their difficulty in having effective communications with American faculty members.

The next two sections discuss Chinese students' coping strategies which they use to deal with their stressors. Chinese students' perceptions toward coping, help-seeking, and counseling concepts and services are explored as well. Their expectations and suggestions on the counseling are included at the end of the discussion.

# Chapter 7

## Chinese International Students' Coping Strategies in the United States

### Coping Strategies

This chapter mainly examines how Chinese students manage their stress; what the coping strategies they use to deal with their stressors are; how they perceive coping, help-seeking, and counseling concepts and services; and what their expectations and suggestions on the counseling are. Results found that Chinese students engage in a wide range of coping strategies to alleviate their stress. When seeking help from others, they primarily turn to their family or other Chinese students. Most of them do not know how the counseling services work or have a hard time telling counselors about their personal problems. Students identify a lack of common language and understanding of mental health concepts, as well as fear of stigmatization, as limiting their expression of psychological needs and stress.

Students' coping strategies are reported and summarized in this chapter based upon Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) two broad coping strategies (problem-focused and emotion-focused). Problem-focused coping generally consists of strategies for altering or managing the sources of the problem itself. Emotion-focused coping denotes behaviors designed to directly eliminate or contain dysphonic emotions elicited by a stressor. Within these two dimensions, categories have been selected which fit the coping strategies disclosed by the students in this study. The complete model used to analyze the data is illustrated in Fig. 7.1.

### *Problem-Focused Strategies*

#### **Direct Action**

Eight respondents in my study indicated that they take direct action to deal with the stressors. A mechanical engineering student claimed:



Problem-focused	Emotion-focused
1. Direct action	1. Endurance
2. Help and social support seeking	2. Taoism “take it easy” or “let it go”
	3. Avoidance
	4. Discharging emotions
	5. Acceptance
	6. Positive reappraisal
	7. Hierarchical ordering of priorities

**Fig. 7.1** Model of coping strategies

I have to try to solve my problems myself, because I am old enough to deal with my problems. I will just try harder to improve my English, try my best to locate a job. No one else can do this but me. (Participant 8)

An MBA student concurred:

To me, direct action is an effective way to deal with the stressors. There is no point if you keep crying, because crying changes nothing. Life is not easy. You have to do something. Locating promising employment is the key to my success in the United States. So, a fundamental stress for me pertained to my worry over finding employment. I kept revising my resumes, sending resumes, practicing interview questions, consulting the professor in our department for interview details. I thought I had already done what was necessary. However, I could not find a job. Many times, I got turned down even in the first round interview. I was so stressed and unable to fall asleep at night. I think what I need to do is not only to feel the stress but also to find a solution, take a risk, and make a change. Last month, I was just rejected by a fortune 500 company, which might be the last chance for me because I will graduate next spring. Even though I was kicked out in the first round, I still felt this position suited me very well. At that moment, two of my classmates passed the first round and got on-site interviews from this company. I asked them the email address and phone number of the manager of this company. Then, I called the manager and recommended myself to him. Unexpectedly, he told me he was interested in my resume and would like to reconsider me as a candidate. Two weeks later, I was informed that I had an on-site interview. Just a couple of days ago, I got an offer from this company. (Participant 1)

An industrial engineering student agreed:

Life is a journey with lots of stress. You have to do what you have to do. Nothing will change, if you are only focused on your suffering. Try to do something. America does not believe “tears.” Try to take action. When you do something, you will forget that pain. (Participant 10)

## **Help and Social Support Seeking**

Soliciting help from others primarily takes the form of talking to friends, mostly conationals, and telephoning family and friends.

A sociology student stated:

I tell my concerns, my stress to my friends who are also from China. They understand me very well. To me, Chinese friends are sources of support because there is a shared experiences and common language. I feel relieved after talking to them. They always help me out either in my academic study or in my personal life. For instance, when I first got here, my program of study made me highly stressed. I was always totally lost when professor lectured. I talked about my concerns with another student in my department who came two years earlier than I did. He told me that the first three months are really hard for everybody and not to give up. Since he took those classes before, he loaned his notes to me and told me how to deal with each class. All of his suggestions are really helpful. Without his help, I can not imagine how I would have survived that first semester. (Participant 2)

Some students spoke about choosing not to tell their family about their concerns, because they did not want to worry or disappoint their parents. Just as an electrical engineering student said:

There is understanding among Chinese students. It is that we have same the experience. We speak the same language. There is no need to explain. I think we can help each other. When I have a problem, I always turn to Chinese friends here. I also call my parents from time to time, but I dare not to call very often, because I am afraid that they will worry about me. I really enjoy talking to my parents. Without their emotional support, I could not persist with my PhD program. (Participant 7)

## ***Emotion-Focused Strategies***

### **Endurance**

An important means of coping with stress is to endure the stress. Students believe challenges or difficulties are a natural part of life and that if they endure them patiently, they will survive. By endurance, they mean to tolerate the stress and to maintain harmonious relationships with others. Endurance contributes to their ability to persevere during periods of intense challenge and difficulty.

A computer science student stated:

Last year, I wanted to change my program from doctoral to master, because I did not want to stay at school for so many years and I would like to finish my program as soon as possible. However, even though my advisor said okay about this, he still wanted me to help him finish as much research as I could. Within a month, he assigned me five projects. It was so intense that I needed to find a job, finish my thesis, and complete my coursework within a month. I felt I was unable to handle so many projects at the same time. However, I did not

whine at all, but just endured it, because I felt the situation would be worse if I fought against with my advisor. I endured these multi-tasks with courage, patience, and hard work. Usually, I went home at 2 o'clock in the morning and got up as early as five o'clock. I even slept in my lab for many nights. (Participant 15)

An environmental engineering student stated that endurance helped her go through a difficult time patiently.

My major is environmental engineering. What I was doing with my research is to defuse the environmental contaminates using the bio-control services. That is, the process of organism growth can defuse or transform harmful elements. However, sometimes, it is difficult for us to tell whether or not all the harmful elements have been defused or transformed. I have to keep doing the experiment until all the harmful elements are proved to be defused. In many times, the results do not match the conceptualized framework. For instance, theoretically only five elements are supposed to remain, while in reality about twenty elements remain. In a case like this, I have to start all over again. I have to redesign the whole experiment, redevelop the environment, and make the organism grow again. Basically, start everything from scratch. I feel very frustrated and stressed, especially after I kept doing experiments hundreds of times, but still did not get the ideal results. I feel the only thing that can help me is adjusting my experiment design over and over again. I remember one day, I stayed in my lab for all day and all night. I adjusted the test methods more than seventy times but failed in the end. When I got home, I told myself that I have to endure this. I cannot quit, because I am an adult and I should be responsible for what I am doing. This is life. There is no point in talking to friends, parents, or whining and crying. (Participant 14)

### **Taoism “Take it Easy”**

Just as discussed earlier, Chinese students also used coping strategies grounded in Taoism. Taoism is an important school of philosophy in Chinese history. Strategies used by Chinese students that reflected Taoism included practicing attitudes of taking it easy and letting it happen. Taking it easy involves taking life as it comes and not fighting against what life brings. An attitude of letting it happen submits all matters of life to fate and Tao.

A finance student stated:

Just take it easy. We have bad days and good days. It is normal. I just try to be at peace with whatever life brings me. Try to change that you can change, try to accept those which you can not change, and try to tell the differences between these two. For instance, when I first got here, it was much more difficult than I had expected. Facing the new environment, new culture, academic challenges, financial difficulties, long separation from my family, as well as concerns over my visa status, I found myself experiencing a variety of stresses from a disjunction between goals and means. Okay, I told myself, this is life, this is reality. I can not change the environment, just as I can not change my foreign identity. I can not change the environment, but I can regulate my emotions and try to make everyday happy. (Participant 4)

An educational psychology student concurred:

Physically, I deal with challenges and difficulties by myself. But emotionally, I try to assume an outsider stance. By outsider, I mean that you should hold such an attitude as “work like you do not need money, love like you have never been hurt, and dance like no one is watching”. Personally, I do have bad days. During these bad days, I just encourage

myself. I tell myself: just imagine life is a novel, and you are one of characters. So, please take it easy and let it happen, just as you read a pre-written novel and it is not you who controls the character's fate. What I need to do is try my best to handle my research and life. Then, I leave the final result up to fate or God. Also, try to observe things and see how they happen and reflect upon why it turned out this way. (Participant 16)

## **Avoidance**

Students in this study engaged in various activities to avoid anxiety, depression, frustration, and other discomfort resulting from stress or concerns. A sociology student identified studying as a way to stop thinking about her stress:

When my boyfriend in China broke up with me, I was so depressed and frustrated that I could not do anything for two months. But one day, I finally thought it through. I knew there is an only way out for me in America. That is, to get a degree and land a job. So, I tried my best to stop thinking about my ex-boyfriend, my love. At the beginning, it was really hard for me to focus on my studies, but later on, I found studying to be a good way to distract myself from my depression. As soon as I sat down in front of my computer and thought about my coursework and my papers, I forgot all of my frustration and depression. (Participant 2)

An environmental engineering student stated that she tried anything to take her thoughts off the stress:

Depression is just like a contaminant, which can contaminate your mental health. Being aware of this, I try not to indulge the feelings of depression or stress, rather I try my best to defuse the bad feelings. If I feel depressed in some way, I talk to my friends, watch movies, go to parties, listen music, sing a song. I try my best to restrain my thinking, because dwelling on the stress or depression just make you feel even worse. As adults, we need to manage or regulate our emotions. Do not allow those bad feelings, such as stress, anxiety, frustration, and depression, to ruin your whole life. Everybody should be responsible for his or her life. (Participant 14)

A music student mentioned a short break or vacation as an effective means of avoiding thinking about stressful things:

When I feel stressed, I just try to run away from all of these stressors. I just need a break from all the things that have happened to me. Last year, there is one week I felt I really could not take it anymore, so I decided to have a break and then I flew back to China. I felt totally refreshed when I got back, even though nothing has changed and stress was still there. One week's vocation gave me the opportunity to break away and to stop thinking about the stress. I was confident that I could deal with the challenge successfully. (Participant 12)

## **Discharge Emotions**

A means of coping with stress is to discharge emotions created by stressful events. This is different from acting on the event itself. Discharging emotions allows the individual to manage feelings which might otherwise be overwhelming. A chemistry student identified exercise as a means for her to manage her stress:

I like to go running or swimming when I feel frustrated. I do not forget my problem, but I burn it off. I push myself until I have no energy to feel tense any more. I can not hold onto my stress when I am exhausted. (Participant 18)

A physics student revealed smoking as a way for him to relieve his stress:

I became a heavy smoker after arriving in the United States. Life is so stressful that I began to smoke more and more everyday. I feel that my daily stress and anxiety can be relieved by smoking cigarettes. The more stressed I am, the more I smoke. There is so much on my mind. There is so much for me to worry about and struggle with. (Participant 13)

Two female students stated that food and candy help to get their minds off their problems as well as to give them temporary comfort. Just as a political science student said:

I have faced many different episodes of stress since arriving in the United States. I feel the need to eat candy whenever I am stressed. I crave for something sweet, especially candy, whenever I am stressed out. I do not know why I have this kind of physical craving whenever I feel the pressure. It lets me feel good to eat something. (Participant 3)

An education psychology student commented:

The more stressed I am, the more I eat. When I am sad, frustrated, depressed, or stressed, I just eat more food. I have gained weight since coming to study in the United States. I think overeating helps me release my stress. (Participant 16)

## **Hierarchical Ordering of Priorities**

Respondents in this study tend to minimize their stress resulting from culture shock, homesickness, marriage and relationship, loneliness or anxiety, by shifting their priorities to their academic performance and future career development.

A public administration student said:

First things first. I convince myself that I am here to pursue my doctoral degree, not to enjoy life. Stress, powerlessness, frustration, homesickness, and loneliness are supposed to be part of our lives here, because we chose to live in a foreign country. I can not blame life or others, because no one but myself pushed me to come here. So, I just put my priority things first. I kept telling myself a doctoral degree is a key to a brighter future in the United State. Studying here is the biggest investment I have made in my whole life. I regard other grievances as being a worthy price to pay for the opportunity of pursuing my studies here. (Participant 11)

An accounting student echoed:

For me, nothing matters but my degree and my future employment. With this in mind, I tend to minimize other negative feelings or let them go. Since academic achievement and career development matter more to me, I prioritize them. According to my own experience, this is a very effective strategy, because I do not have time to worry as I am fully focused on study or job searching. (Participant 6)

## Acceptance

Students accepted that there are challenges to living abroad. Accepting the inevitability of difficulties appears to lessen the negative impact of students' problems.

An MBA student said:

You have to accept the language barrier, financial strain, academic pressure, and job searching difficulties when you chose to study in another country. There is no point in complaining. Only after you are okay with yourself and live with the bad situation, will your mood lighten. (Participant 1)

Another student described in more detail regarding how she accepts the reality and lowers her goals:

I am aware that it is difficult for me to live a stress-free life here. Yes, I had stress while studying and working in China. But nothing like my life in the United States. Since all of us Chinese students are over-achievers in China, we want to keep high academic records. The more we want to remain top students when achieving our goals, the more anxiety and stress we have to face and overcome. In many cases, we just can not take it. In this case, one way to relieve the stress is to rethink or redefine the goal to be achieved. That is, accept the reality and lower your goals. For instance, a step down is the best strategy for me now. I decided to slow down or partly abandon my aspirations to relieve the stress and pressure. For instance, in the first semester, I told myself that I could accept any grade that I made, because I just got here and I have to accept the undesirable. (Participant 3)

## Positive Reappraisal

Seven students identified positive reappraisal as an effective strategy to alleviate their stress. This reappraisal took the form of regarding their new environments as an opportunity to learn and grow.

A sociology student said:

Life is full of problems no matter where you are. It is very difficult to change the environment. The only thing we can do is to adapt to the environment. This adaptation is an all-around, psychological, and ideological process. It is not necessary to change our own ideas or behavior. It is to change our own discomfort level. Maybe this change takes time. But each of us needs to get used to this. When I first got here, my English skills were so lousy that I was totally lost in the classroom. I did not know what the professor was talking about. I felt so stressed for several days. Then, I had a thought which helped me a lot. I told myself that my language barrier justified my coming here. Achieving a high English proficiency is one of major reasons which motivated me to come here. I would not need to come to the U.S., if my English was perfect. What I need is to take advantage of this opportunity to learn "authentic" American English, right? (Participant 2)

An educational psychology student agreed:

My English writing is not good enough. In the first few months, my professors always gave me comments such as "awkward sentences", "I do not know what you want to say". At the very beginning, I felt so frustrated, anxious, and helpless when I saw these comments. But later on, I convinced myself that "no pain, no gain". I reviewed my study experiences and

found improvements usually happened after I felt strained, difficult, and tense. I view my current difficulty as positive, because it suggests that there is room for me to improve. Thinking about this, I felt better and it was much easier for me to deal with the language barrier and handle the stress. (Participant 16)

An organizational behavior student summarized:

To me, all challenges and difficulties are opportunities. I believe I learned a lot from my failures. Life is composed of continuous challenges. Once you conquer the current challenge, you will become stronger emotionally and intellectually. Even though I feel stressed, I never take the challenges as 100% negative. Actually, I feel the challenges provide the opportunity for me to grow and develop. You can learn much more lessons from your failures. (Participant 19)

## **Coping Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Counseling**

### ***Perceptions Toward Counseling***

This section summarizes the data on students' beliefs about coping, help-seeking, and general issues of counseling. The semi-structured interview contained specific questions which asked students about their psychological help-seeking beliefs and behaviors.

Many students in this study are very unlikely to seek help from a counselor or professional psychologists. Students attribute this to a number of reasons, which appear to be culturally driven.

### **Lack of Knowledge Counseling**

Chinese students who come to the United States bring with them their lack of familiarity with Western notions of counseling services. Counseling services are new to many Chinese students. Some of them are not sure if there is a counseling center available on campus or how it works. Others do not make the connection between their personal problems and receiving professional help.

An electronic engineering student stated what most Chinese students believed:

Most Chinese students here chose not to use the counseling services when they met problems. I do not know where these counselors are and how they can help with my problems. I do not think it is for me. It is not familiar to my thinking. So, I do not even consider talking to a counselor about my concern. (Participant 7)

A biochemistry student concurred:

I am not unaware of the counseling center available on campus and am also uncertain what types of concerns they address. I think it is because of the different background. We have no such a thing or idea in China. (Participant 9)

A music student disclosed:

I was aware of the counseling center's presence, but I thought it did not serve international students. (Participant 12)

### **Lack of Need for Counseling**

A male student articulated what most Chinese international students believed: they do not believe that personal problems are cause enough for concern to seek professional help. Instead, they need to take care of their own problems, and asking for help is regarded as a sign of weakness and immaturity. A computer science student stated:

We came here to pursue our degrees and realize our dreams, not to be helped. I would like to seek counseling for those career and academic problems instead of the personal concerns. Even though I felt depressed, frustrated, confused, and helpless from time to time, I never used the counseling center. I believe I should depend on myself to make things work out. Anyway, we are not children any more. So, we should not respond like a "crying baby" whenever we meet a challenge or unexpected negative encounters. Even though we are international students with little assistance in this country, we should stand up on our own feet and learn how to handle things ourselves. (Participant 15)

Though Chinese students acknowledge their psychological difficulties, they deny the need to seek formal help. Some of them deem academic and career problems more important than emotional problems. Others feel that life is always stressful and it is useless to talk about the problem with counselors. A female student held the following belief:

Life is not easy. No matter where you are, you have a stress to deal with. Going abroad offers opportunities, but like life itself, it is fraught with danger and difficulty. It is full of mourning, remorse, and depression. Since it is your own choice to venture out into a new world, you have to live with the potential trauma and crisis it brings. If you can not solve problems, dare not face challenges, or keep whining about life, you are weak and lack of self-control. Even though I feel stressed sometimes, I do not think talking to counseling professionals would work for me. I mean to talk about stress and frustration does not make it go away. If we spend time talking about hard things or whining about bad things, those bad things never change. You have to do something to make things change better. (Participant 18)

### **Doubts About the Ability of a "Stranger" to Help**

Since Chinese culture teaches that one does not share his personal problems with outsiders, most Chinese international students do not believe a "stranger" could help. A social justice student revealed her attitudes:

I do not think counselors could solve my problems. My problems are my problems. How can a person who does not know anything about me can help me out? Maybe they can offer some professional advice, but I am not comfortable confessing my personal problem to a stranger. (Participant 5)



A mechanical engineering student explored further:

I doubt the ability of American counselors to help Chinese international students. Even though they would love to be helpful, it might be difficult for them to understand Chinese students' special needs and problems. Or, they might minimize Chinese student's critical concerns, since they did not understand Chinese students or their culture. (Participant 8)

### **Stigma Attached to Counseling Service**

Most participants in this study tend to attach a stigma to seeking professional counseling service. As one student described:

In China, there is a bias against emotional problems or the mentally ill. It is shameful and disgraceful for Chinese people to admit having emotional problems. In many cases, people with emotional problems are more likely to be stigmatized than patients with physical disabilities are. To "save face", Chinese people try to hide their emotional problems inside themselves or keep it within their families. Therefore, Chinese students are discouraged from expressing concerns and inhibited in seeking help beyond family or close friends. For many of us, going to a counseling service is "out of one's mind". (Participant 13)

Due to a need to "save face" and preserve the family name, Chinese international students are least inclined to move beyond family and social networks to deal with emotional concerns.

### ***Alternative Sources of Support***

When asked where they seek help, if they are not receiving counseling from professional services, most students in this study tend to seek help from their peers or their family. As one male student claimed:

I believe most of us depend on spouses, friends, or parents to manage our emotional and personal difficulties. We rarely think about other support sources such as counseling or psychologists. (Participant 9)

### ***Expectations and Suggestions***

Based on the previous findings, there seems to be a gap between the awareness of psychological problems and the initiative to seek help from counseling professionals or psychologists. When it comes to expectations and preferences toward counseling service, Chinese students made the following suggestions.

## **Ethnical Match and Gender Match**

Students in this study favored having a counselor of the same ethnic background because they believe the counselors with the same ethnic background are more credible and competent. One political science student stated:

The counselor's heritage [ethnicity] is very important. I prefer Chinese counselors, because we have same experience and my problems will make better sense to him or her. Chinese counselors will easily show empathy or sympathy to my problems, which will make our conversation much easier. If I talk to the U.S. counselor, some of my problems probably are not even a problem for them and it is difficult for them to understand and therefore they might tend to minimize the problems. People who are not blind can not really feel what a blind people feel. (Participant 3)

Regarding gender preference, many participants tend to prefer same gender counselors.

## **Counselor Style: Expected Greater Interaction and Expertise from Counselors**

Interview transcriptions indicate that most Chinese students expected greater directness and expertise from counselors. An accounting student stated:

From my point, the counselor should be the expert in the field. He knows everything I talked about, and he can connect what I experienced with his experience. It is best if the counselor can share his experience to help me. He can say, "well, I had the same problem before and that is how I solved it." Or he can offer several options on the path to a solution and let me figure out which one works best for me. That is the most effective counseling style I think. (Participant 6)

From most Chinese students' perspective, counselors are experts as opposed to listeners. Probably due to the authoritarian orientation of Chinese culture, students perceive a direct, paternalistic, and authoritarian style as most effective.

## **Suggestions**

Participants were asked to give suggestions as to how to make counseling service more accessible to the Chinese student population. Many of them pointed out that the international student orientation would be best time to promote the counseling service. Just as a student suggested:

The university has not made it clear what the counseling center does. When we came here, I knew about the writing center and international student service, but I had no idea about what the counseling center's function was or how to access it. So, maybe when new Chinese students arrive, the university should give them enough information and examples about the counseling services. Most of time, just because people might not know what kind of help they can get from the counseling center, they might prefer to seeking informal help from their family or their friends. (Participant 12)

Others made suggestions as to how to make counseling more effective. In their view, counselors should become more aware of the culture background of Chinese students in order to help the students understand the type of counseling services offered, why they are offered, and how these services could interface with the Chinese students' needs and problems.

### ***Summary of Coping Strategies and Beliefs***

For the purposes of this study, students were asked to identify their stressors and concerns, and the perceived effect of those stressors and concerns. Students were then asked to discuss their coping beliefs and behaviors. Their primary help-seeking modes were soliciting help and support from conational friends. Students also relied on their families for support and encouragement, but also chose to hide their serious problems for fear of worrying and disappointing their families.

Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies were used. Students used cognitive reframing to cope with the negative emotional consequences of homesickness, cultural shock, academic challenges, linguistic barrier, financial pressure, as well as concerns over visa status. Emotion-focused coping strategies such as enduring problems or a "take it easy" attitude were frequently employed. Students also avoided and blocked negative feelings. They accepted challenges and difficulties as part of life living abroad. Students also established priorities which placed academic achievement and job opportunities over other concerns such as cultural shock and social isolation. Some students coped with their stress by reappraising their difficulties and challenges as opportunities. Lastly, some students dealt with stress and frustrated feelings by discharging their feelings through various activities such as sports and overeating.

A lack of common language and an unwillingness of students to talk specifically about emotional problems for fear of stigmatization limited a discussion on psychological help-seeking. Chinese international students were unlikely to access the counseling service for help. The students attributed this to a number of reasons which appear to be culturally driven: an unfamiliarity with the counseling, doubts about the ability of a "stranger" to help, issues of shame and stigma, and a preference for other coping strategies.

## Chapter 8

# An Examination of Individual-Level Factors in Stress and Coping Process

As discussed in Chap. 2, Berry's (1997) "stress-coping framework" focuses on the identification of those factors that function as significant stressors and impair sojourners' adaptation to the new environment. According to Berry, both stress and coping are influenced by characteristics of the individual and the society (situation). On the group-level acculturation, migrant groups usually change substantially as a result of living with two sets of cultural influences. These macro-level changes such as economic changes, social changes, culture changes, language shifts, religious conversions, and value systems influence on an individual's stress, coping, and adaptation. On the individual level, individual variables such as age, gender, marital status, length of stay, and field of study affect the stress-coping process. Moreover, an individual's coping strategies and social support are also important factors influencing students' acculturation stress and adjustment.

This section mainly examines the individual-level variables that affect the stress-coping process of Chinese international students and how they conceptualize and adapt to their stress at an American university. The stress, coping, and adaptation are measured by individual variables such as age, gender, field of study, length of stay, expectation, knowledge and skills, acculturation style, coping strategies, and social support.

## Individual-Level (Microlevel) Factors

### *Factors Prior to Acculturation*

#### Age

Age has a known relationship to the acculturation process. Age has been studied as related to foreign students' academic performance and adjustment problems. The

relationships between foreign students' age and their adjustment on a foreign campus, however, are inconclusive. There are two conclusions from different studies: (1) younger students have more adjustment problems than older ones and (2) older students have more difficulties than younger ones (Ward et al. 2001). Based on the findings of the present study, however, younger and older students have different kinds of adjustment problems. Older students experienced more culture shock, job and visa concerns, and immigration pressure, while younger students were more easily subject to academic pressure and homesickness and loneliness.

Older ones often do experience substantial cross-cultural challenges and problems. For instance, a male student in his 30s expressed the stress resulting from losing familiar signs and symbols and being unable to understand American norms or customs. He stated:

It is a challenge for me to socially interact with Americans. Although I sense the need to change some of my ideas, I feel ambivalent about the possibility of change. On one hand, I know adopting American style is important to me; on the other, I want to adhere to my own style by avoiding Americans. I am unable to understand or accept the customs, values, behaviors, and systems in the United States. In my inner heart, probably I am rather backward in my ideology. I feel that I cannot overcome it any more. At this age, I cannot catch up with the fashion anymore. I am lagging behind. I am different from American people. I do not have the same opinion as these people. I do not want to communicate with them. They are very different from me. (Participant 13)

In contrast to older students, younger students lead a less restrained life. They are not as burdened by the language barrier and by culture shock. They watched American dramas and were familiar with the latest pop music while they were in China. Most of them are open-minded and thirst for adventure, longing to see the world. A 21-year-old master's student in chemistry said:

My favorite band is the "Red Hot Chili Peppers"; I am a huge fan of the Phoenix Suns [professional basketball team]; I am a hardcore supporter of Apple products. I follow every [television] episode of *Prison Break*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Desperate Housewives*.

This seems to be the generation that was born to study in America. When asked whether she experienced any difficulties interacting with Americans or cultural shock, she responded:

My parents told me that when the cross-cultural experiences start early, the process is general smooth. I think it is true. I am not sure I experienced any culture shock. I just felt everything was new, and I was excited about the change. (Participant 18)

When asked why older students have a lower level of self-esteem and experience a high level of acculturative stress, five students believed that, given the higher national status of the United States in the world, communication with Americans also carries symbolic meanings of prestige and power for older students, which make them frustrated, nervous, and anxious. A biochemistry student stated this idea clearly:

In terms of interacting with American classmates or professors, I did not sense too much difficulty. I just treat them the same. Many older [Chinese] students consider the US

standard superior to their own, which was “primitive” in the world order. Sometimes I feel sad for them, because if you consider your nationality is inferior to Americans, how can you expect others to respect you and your country. (Participant 9)

In addition to the culture shock, older students experienced more visa, job, and immigration pressures than younger students did ( $t = 2.17, p = 0.014 < 0.05$ ). The follow-up interviews confirm the quantitative findings. A male student in his early 30s stated:

Besides stress from study and new culture, I have suffered from the stress from visa and immigration issues. How much I envy those [Chinese] kids who came to the United States in their early 20s. Making a decision is so easy for them. They can choose to go back or stay here just based on what they want. Even though I do not like living in America, I have to stay here, struggling for the green card, just because my wife and my son do not want to go back China. Everything becomes complicated when it involves your family. (Participant 7)

On the other hand, both the survey findings and the interview results reveal that students whose age is below 25 also were more easily subject to the burden of homesickness and loneliness. A female student said:

I never left home before I came to the United States, so I felt lonely and homesick from time to time, even though I can get along very well with my American friends. I miss the yummy food in China and dislike the Americanized and expensive Chinese food in America. I miss my parents and friends back home. I hate the weekend, when all Americans hang out the parties, and I still have to stay at home, watching the never end *Friends* or *Sex and the City* over and over again. (Participant 18)

## Gender

Both quantitative findings and qualitative results show that gender has a variable influence on the acculturation process. As for academic pressure, no significant gender differences were observed. Other stressors and concerns, however, varied across genders among the subjects. Chinese women expressed more anxiety and frustration in financial situations and dating problems ( $t = 2.18, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ), while men were more easily subject to the stress of future vocational achievement and immigration issues ( $t = 2.93, p = 0.007 < 0.05$ ).

An industrial engineering student stated:

Chinese traditional culture holds different definitions of “success” for men and women. A famous Chinese saying goes, “what guys are afraid of most is being unable to land a decent job, while what women are afraid of most is being unable to find a good guy to get married.” From the very young age, I know for sure that as a guy, my parents’ critical concerns about me are competence and achievement. It is natural for Chinese women to return home, if they are unable to land a successful career. However, there is no alternative for Chinese men who screw up their careers. The unsuccessful men in career are labeled “losers” or “society dropouts.” Owing to these particular cultural factors, Chinese guys feel exceptional pressure from our families’ and our culture’s expectations to excel academically and professionally. (Participant 10)

Another male student concurred:

In China, a culture largely influenced by Confucianism, men are often regarded as the pillar or the bread winner for the family. For instance, it would be considered shameful to some degree if a man were to give up his career for the sake of family; on the contrary, if a woman were to give up her career for the sake of family, she would be regarded as a virtuous wife. Due to the cultural demand for excellence on a Chinese guy, I have suffered from stress since the day I came to the United States. As the foreigners in this land, we are particularly burdened because we start far behind in the race for success and must be exceptionally talented or fortunate to catch up. To tell you the truth, I feel stress has become a part of my life in this country, and I wonder if it will ever go away. (Participant 10)

In contrast, financial pressure and dating concerns are more severe problems for Chinese women than men. One woman student in public administration stated:

Female Chinese graduate students are more easily subject to the financial stress than male students. Research assistantships or teaching assistantships are more likely to be offered to the science and technology majors—where male Chinese students are concentrated—than in the humanities and social sciences where female Chinese students cluster. (Participant 11)

In terms of marriage and dating, a female student in mechanical engineering responded:

Men can date at any age, while women cannot. The pool is very small for women who are beyond a certain age. I turned 37 this year. My major concern is whether or not I can marry in the end. In most male [Chinese] students' minds, a good girlfriend or wife must be pretty or at least above average in appearance. Additionally, she must also be caring and virtuous. The merits possessed by most female Chinese students in America, such as independence, knowledge, and aggressiveness, are considered less important or even disadvantageous. (Participant 8)

## Majors

Based on the quantitative study and the interviews, language barriers and other concerns varied across majors among Chinese students. In part, this is so because language demands vary from major to major. Generally, natural science majors do not require as much or as high a competence in English language skills as do students in the social sciences, which require a better understanding of American culture, values, and social systems. Just as a social justice student stated:

The [English] language demand is pretty high in my major. Writing research papers to the accepted standard is a huge burden for me. My papers were corrected by professors from the very start to the end. The problem was not only the grammar but also the writing style. The Chinese writing style is significantly different from the American style. My professors always criticized my essays as being filled with vague concepts without a well-defined context. Also, the hypothesis stated earlier suddenly become a theory without any verification. (Participant 5)

In addition, just as discussed earlier, students in the social sciences experience much more financial pressure than their peers in the natural sciences do, because research assistantships and teaching assistantship are offered more in the fields of

science and technology than in the humanities and social sciences. A public administration student said:

If I had been in natural science, it would have been easier for me to get a TA or RA. I will apply again for the assistantship, but I feel I will be rejected again since the budget in my department is always tight. The survival pressure is so tense, because not having an assistantship has depleted all my funds. I want more than ever to finish my study here. So, I take whatever jobs are available on campus; but the pay rate of on-campus jobs is kind of low, and what I earn does not cover my living expenses. To make the little bit left over stretch further, I have decided to cut my living expenses even more. (Participant 11)

Lastly, interview transcripts also indicate that job concerns varied across majors among Chinese students. Students whose majors have industrial applications—such as computer sciences or electrical engineering—more easily find jobs in the United States, while few students in the humanities or sciences that have no industrial applications can successfully find jobs after they graduate. A female sociology student said:

Chinese students usually restrict their major choices and are aggregated in natural science majors. It is a strategy to overcome their language barrier: they avoid majoring in the arts and humanities which weigh heavily on verbal and writing skills; they major in the technical fields where language is less of a barrier—where they do not have to deal with essays, term papers, and class discussions. On the other hand, study in the technical fields will provide entry to secure, high-status, well-paying jobs. (Participant 2)

A political science student concurred:

Most of students in the humanities and social sciences are worried about their future in the United States. Many of us could pass examinations, complete degrees, and work at temporary jobs, but we could not find real jobs after we graduated. Three of the previous Chinese international students in my department could not land a job after they graduated. Everyone knows America is a country of survival pressure. This is especially true for students in the social sciences and the humanities. When we cannot cross that threshold of finding a real job in the United States, our lives in America will become grim and cruel. (Participant 3)

## **Expectation**

There is a relationship between the predeparture expectations and the stress-coping process. Interview transcripts indicate that Chinese students who had extremely intense or excessively high expectations about their life in the United States experienced greater stress. In contrast, students who had previous international exposure had more realistic expectations about life in the United States: their expectations matched their actual experiences, facilitated adjustment, and alleviated anxiety and stress. Greater discrepancies between expectations and experiences were associated with elevated levels of depression. An electrical engineering student related:

Before coming to America, most Chinese seem to have visualized it as a paradise with endless entertainment. After we arrive here, however, we find this paradise belongs to Americans only, not to Chinese. I think most of the Chinese students were not able to



imagine the magnitude of the difficulties they would encounter in America when they were in China. They were shocked by both the unexpected difficulties and their inability to effectively deal with those difficulties. The expectations-to-experiences mismatch heightened the unexpected stress. (Participant 7)

A female education psychology student added:

The disparity between my past expectations and the reality in the United States was much bigger than I had ever anticipated. Based on my own experiences, I would say if you are prepared to endure a variety of stresses, say, a new environment, a new culture, academic challenges, a linguistic barrier, financial pressure, long separation from family, as well as concerns over visa status, you are ready to come to the United States. If you expect to enjoy life in the United States, you'd better stay in China. (Participant 16)

In contrast, several students who had overseas experiences addressed their less stressful life in the United States. An environmental engineering student said:

I had been in Holland for 3 years before I came to the United States, so I knew how life in the Western countries differs from life in China. Also, I learned how to cope with the overseas life academically and socially during my stay in Holland. After I moved from Amsterdam to Tempe, [Arizona,] I did not expect a lot, which makes my life a lot easier. Low expectations make it so that I never whined or felt very disappointed. (Participant 14)

An organizational behavior student concurred:

I came to the United States after I finished my master's degree in England. I felt I benefited a lot from the 2 years in England. Studying and living in England provided a realistic and accurate picture of how life overseas is. After I relocated to the United States, I found my expectations were realistic and matched the experiences very much. The unmet expectations which occurred frequently to many Chinese students here never happened to me. Moreover, in some cases, the experiences are more positive than I expected. (Participant 1)

## **Knowledge and Skills**

Culture-specific knowledge and social skills provide the foundation for effective intercultural interactions; they facilitate psychological adaptation to a new socio-cultural environment. The findings of this study reveal that students who had previously resided abroad or had international exposure, especially in international corporations, adjusted significantly better during their subsequent cross-cultural sojourns. A female MBA student said:

Before I came to the United States, I immigrated to Canada and had been there for a year. When looking back, those days in Canada were the most difficult time in my life. I had a very decent job in China. I was a project manager at IBM. I never thought that I could not even find a white-collar job in Canada. My experience in Canada made me believe that other than revolution, there was nothing like going abroad to change the social status of a Chinese so abruptly. After searching for a job three months without any luck, I had to give in. I took a job as a waitress in a local Chinese restaurant. The dish-carrying job lasted six months. I worked either from 11 am to 6 pm or 6 pm to 11 pm everyday. I could no longer

count the plates I carried or the number of guests I served. Although there is nothing disgraceful about manual labor in Canada, I felt I had to move on as soon as possible, because once you begin to rely on this cheapest mode of employment, you will become trapped in a low social stratum and never see daylight again. I applied to an MBA degree program in the United States, and luckily I was accepted by Arizona State University. I think life is fair. After I have been through all that I had suffered in Canada, I feel it is much easier to endure all kinds of stress in the United States mentally and physically; I feel strong enough to deal with any challenge. It turns out I am doing really great in the United States. (Participant 1)

A sociology student described her experience:

I worked at Bertelsmann Shanghai before I came to the United States. Seventy percent of the employees at Bertelsmann Shanghai are from Germany, America, Canada, or other Western countries. Our office was just like the United Nations, and my colleagues were from five continents. English was the working language at Bertelsmann. Due to daily exposure to the international working culture, I learned how to interact with Westerners, achieved a better understanding of Western social systems and values, and developed the expected behaviors during these interactions. Owing to this international exposure, I did not feel much culture shock after I came to the United States. (Participant 2)

A computer science student said:

Of course, to probe the New World required not only commitment and courage but also strategies and techniques. The work experiences at Intel China gave me a lot of training in self-development in an unfamiliar environment, how to interact with colleagues from other countries, how to better understand other cultural systems and social values, and how to develop the expected behaviors in a new culture. With this knowledge and skill, I did not have much difficulty adjusting to life in the United States, so I would suggest that it is better for Chinese students to work for a couple of years before they finally come to the United States. Hands-on working experience teaches you much more than what you can learn at school. (Participant 15)

## ***Factors during Acculturation***

The theme of factors during acculturation includes the subcategories of (a) length of stay, (b) acculturation strategies, (c) coping strategies, and (e) social support.

### **Length of Stay**

How long one has been experiencing acculturation strongly affects the kind of problems and their extent. Both quantitative study and follow-up interviews indicate that newly arrived students expressed more anxiety and frustration in language barrier ( $t = 2.73, p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ), academic challenges, and culture shock, while students who had been here longer, and thus were closer to graduation, were more

easily subject to the stress of future vocational achievement and immigration issues ( $t = 2.17, p = 0.014 < 0.05$ ).

A physics student recalled his 4 years of experience in the United States:

When I first came, I had a greater desire to make friends. Everything was new. I felt very lonely. My life was just like solitary confinement, with no one to talk with on campus and no car to leave campus. My English was awkward, and I felt the language barrier was difficult to overcome. Studying was very hard and I had a lot of frustrations. Now 4 years later, my need for emotional communication and social interaction is much lower than it was during my first semester. My desire to make friends has waned now, and my life is much less stressful. (Participant 13)

A political science doctoral student who had been in the United States for 4 years concurred:

I do not care so much now. The longer I stay here, the less I care. The surprising is not surprising anymore once you see it many times. There are still times I worry, but at least I do not feel the sky will collapse on me anymore. Since I am going to graduate next year, I am now more concerned about how to deal with visa issues, future job opportunities, and immigration things. (Participant 3)

### Acculturation Strategies

Acculturation strategies have been shown to be strongly associated with positive adaptation: integration is usually the most successful, while marginalization is the least successful, and assimilation and separation are moderately successful. For the present study, quantitative study indicates that marginalization is the only significant contributor to Chinese students' appraisal of their overall pressure ( $t = 2.57, p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ). Students who identified themselves as more marginalized were much more stressed than those students who perceived themselves as less marginalized. The other three acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, and separation) are not significantly related to the students' evaluation of their overall pressure in the United States.

Gender differences are observed regarding the marginalization strategy. Student women easily identified themselves as marginal between Chinese and American cultures, while student men less so ( $t = 3.12, p = 0.003$ ). This suggests that women in this study vacillated more between Chinese and American cultures, identifying with neither, nor being accepted by either, for that matter. An education psychology student clarified her identity conflict:

I do not have any American friends, nor do I have any interaction with Chinese students here. I live an isolated life in the United States with few friends around. I celebrate neither Chinese holidays nor any American holidays. American people think I am a Chinese, while people in China think I am not a pure Chinese anymore, but an Americanized Chinese. Sometimes I cannot help but wonder who I am: American, Chinese, or Chinese American. (Participant 16)

Based on the quantitative study, most Chinese students adopt integration as their acculturation strategy and chose to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily

interaction with Americans ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). The follow-up qualitative study, however, reveals that although most Chinese students displayed a willingness to adopt the integration strategy, their actual behavior did not support such an inclination. For instance, the interview transcripts show most of the engineering and natural science students tended to assume the separation strategy, withdrawing from social activities and confining their interaction within their own community. As a consequence, they were further isolated from American culture which hindered cultural understanding. In contrast, students in the business school tried to adopt the assimilation strategy, explicitly claiming that they wanted to “assimilate as soon as possible.” An accounting doctoral student stated:

I do not have any Chinese friends here, because I really want to be an American. By that, I mean I want to speak English without an accent, be courteous and respectful to others, and enjoy life to the best of my ability. I speak American English fluently and am capable of using the latest fashionable words and phrases. I meet Americans, visit their homes, and learn their lifestyles. Different from most Chinese who rent an apartment in Chinatown, I share a house with two American guys. I do not contact any Chinese students in my department, and I can sense they do not like me either, because they feel I am kind of whitewashed. But I really do not care what they think about me. (Participant 6)

## Coping Strategies

Related to acculturation strategies are the coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have identified two general coping strategies: problem-focused (attempting to change or solve the problem) and emotion-focused coping (attempting to regulate the emotions associated with the problem). More recently, Endler and Parker (1990) have identified a third: avoidance-oriented coping.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), a typical Western perspective of creative problem solving is an example of problem-focused coping. In contrast, Chinese people prefer to deal with stress by employing emotional coping strategies. The present quantitative study found that there is no significant difference among three coping strategies. Chinese students engage in a wide range of coping strategies to cope with their stress. The interview transcripts, however, confirm previous studies' findings that Chinese students typically prefer using emotion-coping strategies. A mechanical engineering student argued:

As sojourners here, most of us are powerless to change entire cultures or external environments, and in many cases, we have limited resources for changing the troublesome features of the stress-provoking environment. In these instances, emotion-focused coping may be more effective than problem-focused coping in reducing stress. (Participant 8)

A bioengineering student concurred:

I preferred to take direct actions when I was in China. In contrast, here [in America] I most often try changing my perceptions or appraisal of stressful events. In many cases, there is nothing we can do about the stressful environment or external culture. What we can do is change our perceptions and regulate our emotions to suit the environment. (Participant 17)

When employing emotion-coping strategies such as endurance, there is a significant difference between single and married students ( $t = 2.488$ ,  $p = 0.016 < 0.05$ ). Single students ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) use endurance to cope with their daily stress more than married students do ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ).

## Social Support

Social support has been viewed as a major resource in the stress and coping literature and as a significant factor in predicting the psychological adjustment during cross-cultural transitions. Based on interview transcripts, for Chinese students, social support may arise from a variety of sources, including family, friends, church, and professional counseling.

### Support from Family

Parents and family members are the most important resources for students when they are in crisis. When seeking help from others, Chinese international students tend to look first to their family. When ranking the four sources of support—family, friends, church, and professional counseling—most of the students identified family as the preferred help resource. This result reflects the Chinese cultural emphasis on family ties. Another factor accounting for their unwillingness to request outside help for emotional concerns might be the need to “save face” and preserve the family name.

### Support from Friends

#### *Conational Support (Support from the Chinese Student Community)*

When it comes to *conational* support—support from fellow citizens from the same home country, in this case, the Chinese student community—participants indicated that conationals provide necessary support when needed, but these relationships tend to contribute to the Chinese students’ social isolation from American society and culture. On one hand, the interviews indicate that Chinese friends not only offer knowledge-based resources and share information about coping with a new environment but also provide emotional support. Because most Chinese students have experienced varieties of stress in the American educational settings, conational friends are an important source of emotional support. Although Chinese students do not usually or easily reveal their thoughts and feelings to others, it is not uncommon for them to share their sufferings or pressure. A male computer science student confided:

To me, my [Chinese] friends here are the most preferred source of help for solving adjustment problems. They not only give me lots of information about how to adjust to

the new environment but also encourage me when I am stressed, depressed, or frustrated. (Participant 15)

A political science student stated:

I need to feel I belong, especially on weekends. Walking home carrying my backpack, I saw cars passing by, each one loaded with American students laughing and screaming on their way to parties. I felt so sad. Then, three Chinese friends and I decided to get together every Friday night. Whenever I am with my [Chinese] friends, I am relaxed and happy. (Participant 3)

Although acknowledging that the cultural enclave enhances their psychological security, self-esteem, and sense of belonging, as well as alleviating their stress and anxiety, Chinese students also realize that dependence on their conationals pressures them to withdraw from social activities and thereby impedes their culture learning. An industrial engineering student complained:

Going abroad is supposed to provide an opportunity for broadening a person's perspective; however, it turns out that most Chinese international students here confine their lives to a small circle of friends and activities. Frequently, we live in the same place for several years. On campus, we meet the same people, say the same things, and buy the same things from the same stores. During holidays, the same friends take turns hosting get-togethers. (Participant 10)

A finance student added:

A small circle of Chinese friends is just like a besieged fortress. It seems no one inside the besieged fortress really cares what is going on outside. The monotony life within the circle makes what we are concerned with become increasingly trivial, such as how to get a good deal on eBay or Dealsea, who was supposed to host the dinner on the coming weekend, and the most important issue in life was how to get an H-1 visa or a green card. I feel I am becoming increasingly parochial, bored, and passive, when my social life is confined to two or three good friends. I want to escape this besieged fortress and have some real interactions with Americans. (Participant 16)

While they display a willingness to get to know more Americans and make friends, their actual behavior does not support such inclination. A sociology student said:

Somehow, I feel I need to make American friends, because I know the more I interact with Americans, the more I can learn about American society and culture; however, I only made the effort and took the initiative when I first got here. Later on, I went back to my small circle of Chinese friends again, since it is natural for people to take things easy and avoid difficult situations. Believe it or not, it is easier and more enjoyable to chat in your native language. (Participant 2)

## Host National Support

Compared to the conational support, *host national* support—from domestic friends and colleagues in the country, international students are visiting, in this case,

Americans—is used much less by Chinese students, although research indicates that host national support is the single best predictor of successful adjustment (Brein and David 1971). It is widely recognized that host national contact facilitates the learning of culture-specific skills for life in a new cultural milieu. Comfort and satisfaction with local contacts have been associated with greater general satisfaction in foreign students, including both academic and nonacademic aspects of international students' overseas experiences. An accounting student commented:

My American friends help me a lot. When I first got here, my roommate, Michael—a nice American guy—picked me up from the airport and drove me to the supermarket. He also taught me how to drive and gave me lots of information and suggestions when I bought a car. Another American lady, Tamara, who is the instructor of English writing, helped me a lot with my grammar and sentences. We have even kept in contact, although I took her class 5 years ago. She still tells me which word or usage is not authentic and what the correct word should be when we exchange e-mails. Julie, a professional, is working on Wall Street. We met at an accounting conference 2 years ago, and since then we have become good friends. She treats me like a family member and invites me to her family reunion every summer. We really have a good time when we get together. She also gave me academic help. When writing my dissertation, I needed to analyze several large companies' annual stock data; but it is too expensive for an individual to purchase or install such a huge database. I really could not afford it. When Julie heard about my problem, she told me she could download every year's corporate stock data set for me from her company. She spent a lot of time and energy compiling that data for me. With her help, I successfully finished the data collection part [of my research]. I feel I am so lucky to have good American friends. They are part of my life in America. (Participant 6)

Host nationals provide information as well as material and social support. The relationship between the frequency of contact with locals and international students' stress, however, is inconclusive. There are two conclusions from different studies: (a) extensive contact with host nationals facilitates the international students' psychological adjustment and (b) more extensive host national contact increases psychological distress (Ward et al. 2001). We found that the discrepancies between their actual and desired contact with Americans correlated with their stress. A chemistry student reported:

In China, I imagined that I could interact with Americans very often and my English would improve a lot if I could pursue my studies in America. After I got here, I found things are not what I expected. It seems like I am still in China. The people I interact with very frequently are all Chinese: my advisor is Chinese, all of my four lab mates are students from China, and my roommate is a Chinese girl as well. During the week, other than two classes when I get the chance to listen to American professors lecture in English, I do not talk in or listen to English at all. This makes me very stressed. It will be embarrassing if I still speak English awkwardly, or use a lot of Chinglish expressions, after I graduate and go back to China in 4 years. (Participant 18)

In contrast, a social justice student feels that a lot of interaction with Americans is overwhelming. She stated:

Being the only foreign student in the department where all of my professors and classmates are either Americans or from [other] Western countries, I feel like a baby in an adult world—or a person who does not know how to swim, but is forced into a pool. I have to start everything from scratch. My English is not as good as an American. A lot of cultural

subtleties I do not understand. The more I interact with Americans, the more I feel intimidated, stressed, nervous, and lost. Sometimes, I feel life would be much easier if there were another Chinese student in my department. At least, we could share our feelings and encourage each other. I am not sure if this is because of my shy personality or my broken English, or both. Or if it is simply because I am not ready psychologically to be in this environment where Americans are overrepresented and English is the predominant language. (Participant 5)

### Support from Church

Previous studies indicate that when it comes to coping with their stress, Chinese students rarely choose to go to church for religious comfort (Sun and Chen 1997; Frank 2000); the quantitative study confirms this result ( $M = 1.55$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). The interview transcripts, however, reveal that church is increasingly becoming a place for providing emotional or instrumental support. Most Chinese students acknowledged that church is an important place for forming and building friendships and a good source of local community information. As one student claimed:

Although most of us are not Christians in China, we attend a Chinese or American church to interact with people from different backgrounds. I go to a Chinese Christian church every Sunday: it has become a routine in my life. One benefit of going to church is that it affords me the chance to meet very friendly and open-minded people. Another benefit is that I get lots of useful information at church. Whenever I encounter a problem such as how to buy a car, how to find a job, and even how to apply for [an H1B work] visa, the brothers and sisters at church are always available to answer my questions. Their information and suggestions are very helpful and make my life in the United States much easier. (Participant 4)

In addition, church gives the Chinese students who are accustomed to a collective life and the care of their institutions a feeling of belonging. A computer science student said:

Everybody needs to feel they belong. This is especially true for us Chinese international students in the United States. In China, in school and at the workplace we get used to a collective lifestyle; however, few places or institutions like the church in the United States can provide [such a community that] can satisfy our need to belong, since American people tend to be much more individualistic. I think that is why more and more Chinese students—whether because of religious belief or for other reasons—take up institutionalized religion in America. A classmate of mine who was active in group activities in college became a devoted Christian after living in America for several years. (Participant 15)

Besides emotional support, church is also instrumental in helping Chinese students in their daily lives. A biochemistry student recalled:

Even though I am not a Christian, I really appreciate everything the church did for me. I cannot imagine how I would have handled life in the United States without the church's help, especially during the first several weeks. When I first got here, the person who picked me up from the airport was a volunteer from church. For the first 2 weeks, a nice lady in the church kindly offered me temporary lodging at her house. Given most students did not have a car their first semester, the church brothers took us shopping every weekend. (Participant 9)



## Professional Support from Counseling

The quantitative study revealed that Chinese students' highest preferences for seeking help were family members ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) and friends ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). Counselors and professional psychologists ( $M = 1.31$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) were the least mentioned resources. When asked why they rarely seek professional help when they experience psychological depression, interview transcripts indicate that the interviewees have varied beliefs about why this is so. They may be prone to the culturally derived causes of underutilization, namely, the stigma associated with psychological difficulties. A chemistry student explained why she had a hard time telling counselors about her personal problems:

You know, the Chinese culture teaches us not to share our personal problems with outsiders. Talking to a counselor about psychological problems or admitting emotional difficulties is viewed as bringing disgrace and shame to the family. As such, we usually turn to our family or other Chinese students for help when we are in crisis or trouble. (Participant 18)

Different from those students who attribute underutilization to the culturally derived factors, some students believed that the underutilization of the counseling service is mainly due to Chinese students not knowing how counseling services work. Unsure if their problem warranted professional counseling, they were unfamiliar with how to access these services.

Chinese students who come to the United States bring with them a lack of familiarity with Western notions of mental health and counseling services. We do not make the connection between our personal problems and receiving professional help. (Participant 12)

My study also revealed that it is much easier for Chinese students in the business school to accept the American concept of counseling and to use a counseling service. Out of 18 respondents, only two students had used counseling services, and both of them were from the business school.

## Summary

Since the late 1970s, sending students abroad has been a central part of the Chinese government's policy. "Almost overnight, [Chinese] perceptions of America underwent a global change, from the decadent capitalist country to the land of gold and freedom" (Wang 1992, p. 10). Attracted by educational opportunities and the so-called American dream, China's educated population vied for opportunities to go to the United States, despite the great uncertainties involved. Swept away by the fever of foreign study, most of them failed to think about the potential danger and difficulty of going abroad. As illustrated by the interview transcripts, the majority of participants were unsure about the exact goal of their upcoming sojourn when they left China.

Study abroad offers greater opportunities, but like life itself, it is full of stress and difficulty. As the analysis presented here shows, Chinese students' stress coping and adaptation are not only influenced by group-level acculturation factors (e.g., society, culture, economics, and employment), but they are also influenced by individual-level factors (e.g., age, gender, major, marital status, expectations, predeparture knowledge, and skills). As a mature adult, before making a final decision about studying abroad, one should not only look at the overall picture of Chinese students' group acculturation in the United States but also take careful consideration of the individual factors to determine whether one is personally ready for the inevitable stressors and difficulties.

## Chapter 9

# Conclusion

In this chapter, the data presented in Chaps. 5, 6, and 7 was discussed and interpreted within the context of the research purposes and questions outlined in Chap. 1. The data was also discussed in reference to the literature presented in Chap. 2. This chapter begins with a summary of the study of Chinese international students' stressors, coping strategies, and help-seeking beliefs and concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

### Summary of the Study

#### *Objectives*

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it was an investigation of the stressors and concerns of a sample population of Chinese international students. Second, this study sought to broaden the understanding of Chinese international students' coping beliefs and behaviors. It was also the aim of this study to contribute to the process of informing future services and programs for Chinese international students studying in the United States.

#### *Methodology*

The study combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the gathering of data. This study adopted a design of mixed methods—the sequential explanatory design. This design was characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. It was a descriptive study which explored the stressors and coping behaviors of Chinese international

students. Data was collected by means of a self-designed questionnaire: the Survey of Stressors and Coping Strategies of Mainland Chinese Students, which was completed by 60 students at Arizona State University. Data was also collected by semi-structured interviews of students in different departments. Broadly based, open-ended questions were designed, along with a list of more focused questions (see Appendix B) to guide each interview. The interview format was piloted on three mainland Chinese students. Nineteen students were interviewed for the final study.

### ***Data Analysis***

The questionnaire data was analyzed in several ways. The demographic data was analyzed and presented. The stressors, concerns, help-seeking sources, and coping behaviors were analyzed and presented using their means and standard deviations. Differences across individual variables such as gender, age, major, length of stay, and marital status were analyzed using unpaired t-tests.

The semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed systematically for themes. Data was coded, categorized, and analyzed within the following areas: What are the primary stressors and concerns of these students? To whom do they usually turn for help in time of trouble or when psychologically depressed? What are the specific strategies they used in their life or study to deal with their stress? Data was organized into the following five broad categories: (1) personal concerns, (2) sociocultural concerns, (3) academic stress, (4) coping strategies, and (5) coping beliefs and suggestions for helping international students. Data was then grouped into subcategories. Themes were presented with examples of students' statements to illustrate the theme.

### ***Overview of the Results***

#### **Chinese International Students' Stressors**

The results of this current study indicate that Chinese international students are likely to have the least positive or satisfying experience, experience more psychological disturbance, and have greater concerns in general than other international students. However, the current study did not collect data from non-Chinese students so a direct comparison cannot be made.

Survey findings revealed that the lives of Chinese students in the United States have never been easy and they have had to endure multifaceted life stresses. The quantitative study shows that job opportunities, visa, and immigration issues ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ), academic pressure ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ), dating or

**Table 9.1** Means and *SD* of items indicated as greatest stressors

	Item	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Planning to stay in the United States and find a job after I finish my degree program	60	4.05	1.12
2	F1 student visa will be a barrier to my employment in the United States	60	3.90	1.14
3	Making good friends with Americans	60	3.73	1.10
4	Having successful communications with Americans	60	3.50	1.28
5	Securing the teaching or research assistantship	60	3.91	1.16
6	Living a modest life	60	3.51	1.26
7	Good grades bring the feeling of self-esteem and self-worth	60	3.38	1.16
8	Spending more time studying	60	3.71	1.02
9	Writing research papers	60	3.51	1.21
10	Making presentations	60	3.51	1.10

marriage pressure ( $M = 3.78, SD = 1.02$ ), language barrier ( $M = 3.60, SD = 1.10$ ), and financial concern ( $M = 3.56, SD = 0.62$ ) rank high among the stressors.

Individual variables such as gender, major, age, and marital status showed significant influences on stress. As for academic pressure, no significant gender differences were observed. Other stressors and concerns, however, varied across gender among the subjects. Female Chinese students expressed more anxiety and frustration in language situations ( $t = 2.69, p = 0.009 < 0.05$ ) and dating problems ( $t = 2.18, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ), while male students were more easily subject to the stress of future vocational achievement and immigration issues ( $t = 2.93, p = 0.007 < 0.05$ ).

When significant differences between majors were identified, social science students rated their stress significantly more severe than natural science or engineering students did. Social science students recorded experiencing more financial stress than students in natural science did ( $t = 3.85, p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ). Language problems and concerns varied across majors among Chinese students as well ( $t = 3.06, p = 0.005 < 0.05$ ), with social science students having more language barriers than natural science students.

Significant differences in stress levels were also observed between married and single students. Married students experienced substantially less stress than single students did when it comes to academic pressure ( $t = 3.11, p = 0.003 < 0.05$ ), loneliness ( $t = 2.20, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ), dating or marriage problems ( $t = 3.63, p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ), and cultural shock ( $t = 2.17, p = 0.03 < 0.05$ ). With the support of their spouse, married students' adjustment is likely to be less stressful compared to that of single students.

Age showed variable influence on the acculturation process as well. Older students experienced more visa, job, and immigration pressure ( $t = 2.17, p = 0.014 < 0.05$ ), while younger students were more easily subject to academic pressure, homesickness, and loneliness ( $t = 2.73, p = 0.01 < 0.05$ ).

Based on the findings found in Chap. 4, Table 9.1 presents the ten most frequently reported concerns and stressors of the respondents, based on the mean

score for each item. Within these ten concerns, two were job opportunities, visa, and immigration related: remaining in the United States to pursue other life goals after graduation (4.05) and viewing the F1 student visa as a barrier to their future employment in the United States (3.90); two were related to financial concerns: securing a teaching or research assistantship (3.91) and living a modest life (3.51); two were sociocultural: making friends with Americans (3.73) and having successful communication with Americans (3.50); two were academic: getting good grades (3.38) and spending more time studying (3.72); two were language related: writing research papers (3.51) and making presentations (3.51).

It is interesting to look at areas in which students expressed the least concern. The least concern was finding a future job in China (2.13). The result is not entirely surprising given that most Chinese students tend to remain in the United States to pursue other life goals after graduation.

The next to last frequently identified concern was seeking off-campus employment (2.25). This is probably because it is illegal for Chinese students to seek off-campus jobs. Part-time student employment limits the location (on-campus) and hours students are permitted to work (a 20 h per week maximum). Other items which were of slight concerns were understanding professors' lectures (2.50) and accepting American sociocultural values such as individualism, competitiveness, and assertiveness (2.61).

The follow-up qualitative study provides additional evidence to further validate the result of the quantitative study. Chinese students report having stress and concerns in three major areas: personal, sociocultural, and academic. Within each of these three major areas, sub-themes were identified. The interview findings are discussed with reference to relevant findings from the Survey of Stressors and Coping Strategies of Mainland Chinese Students.

### Personal Concerns

Job opportunities, visa problems, and immigration concerns are issues that are rarely addressed in the literature on international student development. The findings of this study, however, revealed that job opportunities, visa problems, and immigration concerns were identified as the greatest concern. Students who were interviewed reported feeling lots of restraints due to their visa status. Major restraints included the limited number of working hours; the restriction to having an on-campus job, even if the student faced an urgent financial emergency; the limitations in applying for student loans because students are neither citizens nor permanent residents of the United States; the travel restrictions forbidding students return to China to visit their parents, husbands, or wives because they might not be able to obtain a visa to come back to the United States; the difficulties associated with changing visas if students decide to remain in the United States to pursue other life goals after graduation; and the very limited opportunities for foreign students to switch their student visas in order to become permanent residents of the United

States. Students identified chronic stress from “marginal status” as a daily struggle for most Chinese international students.

Interview transcripts also indicated that Chinese students felt American visa policies placed them in a role conflict. They must pretend to be dedicated students who are legally in the United States only temporarily to pursue their advanced degrees, yet they secretly want to remain in the United States after their graduation and find a way, though it is not guaranteed, to acquire permanent resident status or US citizenship. Despite the great frustration and restraints associated with their F1 visa status, most students felt that their frustrating lifestyle seemed less painful compared to millions of Chinese youths who remained in China, because they cannot even get entrance visas from US embassies.

Regarding return to China for future employment or other life goals, strong uncertainty prevailed among Chinese students in this study. If the initial Chinese student migration to America was push oriented, entrance into American society certainly increased the impact of pull factors in America in reducing student return. For question 12, most Chinese students tended to want to remain in the United States to pursue other life goals after graduation ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). Interview participants reported their return expectations in the short term were low. Major reasons students identified accounting for their non-return were not surprisingly the same as what had pulled them here: better living and working conditions, higher salary, better research facilities, greater career development opportunities, and personal freedom. At the same time, they did mention that their long-term intentions of staying in America were not high either. Most of them preferred returning to China after they had spent several years working internationally or secured an American “green card.” Their strong roots in China, cultural alienation in America, marginal status, and China’s booming economy all contribute their possible return. Due to their delayed return, most of them were not very concerned about their job opportunities in China. On the question 12, future employment opportunities in China were not a significant stressor ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) compared to job opportunities in the United States ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ).

Dating or marriage is an issue that is rarely addressed in the literature on international students. Students in this study regarded dating and marriage as very important in their cross-cultural experiences. Regarding romantic relationships, students felt powerless in the face of factors such as distance, long separations, limited numbers of candidates, excessively high expectations, and academic introverted personalities, all of which decrease the possibility of successful matches. In addition, the interview transcripts showed single students encountered more dating problems and suffered more psychological distress about their future marriage possibilities than married students did.

This finding confirmed the results of the survey questionnaire which showed single students encountered more dating problems and suffered more psychological distress about their future marriage possibilities ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ) than married students did ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). Gender showed significant influences as well, with female students feeling more pressure from dating and marriage than male students did. Male students tended to be more academically oriented and

socially isolated, dating little and failing to take initiatives when it came to relationships.

In addition, a great concern of participants who were interviewed was that long distances and long-term separations might result in the breakup of their relationships or marriages. Because a high percentage of Chinese international students expressed that the breakup of a relationship or marriage would bring them lots of emotional stress, it is important to pay attention to the particular emotional needs these students experience.

Financial difficulties give students a lot of restraints socially and academically. Socially, they have to live a frugal life. Academically, financial aid limits students' choices, and they have to give the highest priority to the assistantships rather than personal interests when it comes to choosing universities or majors. Students' personal experiences confirm the findings of previous studies (Wan 2001; Situ et al. 1995). Marginal syndrome, accompanied by loneliness and longing for home and identity, is pervasive among Chinese students and makes their sojourn painful.

Homesickness and loneliness were overwhelmingly identified as a problem by the interview participants. Homesickness and loneliness were identified in students' comments when they referred to missing familiar aspects of Chinese culture, missing friends and family in China, and losing familiar support systems. According to participants, homesickness and loneliness were particularly intense when students encountered problems or were sick.

Although homesickness appeared to be a widespread problem among Chinese international students, it is unclear whether homesickness and loneliness were directly related to their psychological depression or anxiety. On the question one from the questionnaire (How often is each of the following factors making you feel depressed or stressed in United States?), homesickness and loneliness were identified as the least stressor to students ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ).

### Sociocultural Concerns

Research on international students has identified important issues of acculturation stress and cultural shock. According to Oberg (1960), culture shock involves such aspects as strain; a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation; being rejected or rejecting others; confusion, surprise, or anxiety; and a feeling of impotence. Oberg argued that "cultural shock is precipitated by anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 167). Oberg regarded culture shock as a normal reaction to an unfamiliar environment, as part of the process of adapting to new cultural surroundings.

In this study, Chinese students reported that they experienced high levels of culture shock and encountered great difficulty adjusting to life in the United States ( $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). These findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers on Asian students' culture shock (Yang and Clum 1994). Yang and



Clum (1994) studied the life stresses and suicide rate in the Asian student population in America, and they concluded:

In a society, the culture always provides normative information to guide an individual's behaviors and thoughts. The absence of the normative information produces a good deal of life-stress. Entrance into one culture from another often results in a temporary vacuum of information regarding behavior appropriate to the new culture. The more different the two cultures, the more stressful the adjustment is likely to be (p. 127).

Chinese students come from different cultural backgrounds. When they enter a different culture, most of the familiar cues are removed and are followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety. They are unable to understand, control, or predict other people's behavior. They are confused in roles, expectations, and values. They feel impotent on many occasions because of their inability to cope with the new environment. Chinese students' coping experiences are likely to be more difficult compared to those of students from European countries or even those students from other Asian countries, as China and the United States have been identified as having a maximum cultural distance (Samovar and Porter 1991). Furthermore, research has indicated that international students who come from non-European backgrounds, the third-world countries and/or Eastern countries, tended to suffer more stress in adjusting to American campus life (Lin 1998; Perkins 1977). China is all of the three: a non-European, a third-world country, and an Eastern country. Chinese students encounter the challenges and difficulties people from all three of these backgrounds encounter. With so many difficulties, Chinese students should expect to experience much more sociocultural anxiety than students from other countries do.

Most research subjects described their experiences of culture shock primarily in terms of what they expected based on their preconceived ideas about the United States. Students often felt disappointed with their experiences, particularly if their expectations about life in the United States had been high. A loss of familiarity (including a familiar support system) combined with unexpected negative events resulted in anxiety and frustration. A male student expressed his disappointment about his experiences his first semester in the United States. Not only was he adjusting to life in the new culture, but he was also adjusting to the loss of his preconceived ideals, which was a double frustration for him.

Chinese international students' tendency to interact mostly with co-nationals is consistent with the findings of previous research on international students. Students talked about wishing for greater social contact with Americans but found it difficult to initiate. "Building friendships with Americans" ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) and "successfully communicating with Americans" ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) were the most difficult things for Chinese students to adjust to at an American university. Most Chinese students attributed their social ineffectiveness to the cultural distance between China and the United States. The interview transcripts showed most of them felt it was difficult to decipher the rules and the norms of discourse and social engagement. Few of them participated in social activities, partly because they did not know how to participate or behave in social situations. All of their confusion

was compounded by their language barriers. A general lack of appropriate language and social skills among Chinese students often led to feelings of social isolation.

Although research has suggested that interaction with host nationals is the single best predictor of successful adaptation (Bochner 1981), Chinese students in this study indicated that social and emotional needs were best met by interacting with their co-nationals. None of the students identified Americans as their primary social network. Most of them, however, acknowledged that their tendency to withdraw from social activities and confine their interaction to their own community increased their isolation from American culture and negatively impacted their cultural adjustment and English language proficiency improvement.

Interview transcripts also revealed that American people's values of openness and individualism, their tendency to exhibit self-centered behavior, and their ability to confront and to criticize were not well accepted by the Chinese students. Some of respondents felt they had to transform themselves in order to succeed or simply to survive at an American university. For instance, some students made "deep socio-cultural transfers" in values such as "aggressiveness versus humbleness" or "manual labor versus mental intellectuals" against their instincts. They made behavioral adjustments as they began to understand the cultural bases for accepted behaviors.

### Academic Stress

Chinese culture has gained worldwide recognition for the pursuit of academic achievement of their young (Aldwin and Greenberger 1987). Traditional Chinese culture places well-educated scholars in the highest social rank. Academic achievement is also an honor to the family. Dedication to scholarship becomes not only a personal goal but also a culture goal for Chinese international students. Succeeding academically was overwhelmingly identified as the greatest concern and primary goal of Chinese international students. Many Chinese students in this study indicated they study harder and devote most of their time to schoolwork than the average American student. They also acknowledged that because of their own devotion to academic excellence, they were socially isolated and had few other interests and recreations.

The interview findings confirmed the results regarding the motivation of students' hard work from quantitative surveys. The most frequently identified motivators were "good grades bring a feeling of self-esteem and self-worth," "education is the only hope for social acceptance and financial security in the United States," and "high expectation and sacrifice from parents." Students spoke about exceptional pressure placed on them by their families' and cultures' expectations to excel academically. Because of the influence of Confucianism, scholars are accorded high privilege and social status in Chinese society. Chinese parents place great emphasis on the academic achievement of their children. Most Chinese students who were interviewed stated that from their families' point of view, working very hard at their educational achievement and receiving higher degrees from the United States bring honor to the family. In addition, in many Chinese students' eyes, an

American degree is a guarantee of social and economic ascent either in China or in the United States.

Also, for some students, high parental expectations and constant pressure to do well in school and the fear of failure create extreme stress and anxiety. In their eyes, failure not only brings disgrace to the person concerned but also to the family and to some extent their ethnic group. For others, since attaining an advanced degree is a major way for them to achieve higher status in China or to pursue their dreams in the United States, the potential negative consequences of academic failure are considerable.

When identifying the sources of academic stress, quantitative study showed the classroom interaction (speaking up, making presentations, and asking questions) ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) and academic paper writing ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) rank highest among all the stress sources. Supporting survey findings, interview transcriptions indicated that the most frequently mentioned academic stressors are classroom interactions and academic writing, which are followed by the student-advisor relationship and adjustment to American academic settings. Just as a student commented:

Every Chinese student is very concerned these problems: How do you act in the classroom? How do you participate in the discussion? How do you ask questions? How do you talk to your professors? How do you interact with your academic advisors? (Participant 19)

As for the strategies used to overcome the academic challenges, interview findings were largely consistent with survey findings. For instance, consistent with survey findings, interview transcriptions showed that “spending more time and efforts on study to enhance academic strength” and “seeking insights or suggestions from friends or classmates” are Chinese students’ preferred strategies. A small disparity between survey findings and interview results, however, has been detected. Although survey findings showed that “increasing reading after class to compensate for weaknesses in listening comprehension during lectures” and “anticipating and preparing to avoid potential problems” were less frequently used strategies, interview transcriptions revealed Chinese students used them very often. Students who were interviewed reported that they spent a lot of time outside of class reading books and other related materials. They claimed that this process helped them to fill in the gaps they experienced during lectures. They also said that they anticipated and tried to prevent some situations from occurring. Eight Chinese students anticipated that they would have problems communicating with a faculty member due to their English skills. To prevent miscommunication from happening, these students wrote down what they were going to say and memorized the words before the meeting.

Previous studies found that the English proficiency is a stumbling block for many Chinese students; a lack of English proficiency is the greatest barrier in their academic adjustment process. In this study, language barrier and communication problems were identified as great stressors both by students who completed the questionnaire and by the students who were interviewed. When asked what factors accounted for their language difficulties, participants who were interviewed

reported that lack of contextual knowledge or cultural background, infrequent chances to practice English, and inadequate language training were the most significant factors. These results were consistent with quantitative findings. In addition, respondents especially mentioned that the English training they received in China often was designed to enable them to pass the standardized test like the TOEFL or the GRE, widely required for admission to graduate programs in the United States. This type of language training often failed to adequately help them meet the academic demands of their programs and rarely prepared them for the subtleties of social interaction. Many of them indicated that while they achieved extra high score on the TOEFL or the GRE, they still have had great difficulty in understanding and communicating in English.

Students also expressed there is a tension between their desire to improve their spoken English and their need to communicate freely in Chinese. Just as a female student summarized:

It is just a cycle of stress and frustration. In the hope of improving my English language skills, I sought out opportunities and initiate communications with Americans. However, it is difficult to engage in successful communication with Americans due to my language deficiency and cultural deficiencies. After many “communication breakdowns” or “communication disruptions,” I became frustrated and tended to retreat back to my “Chinese circle.” Then I increasingly interacted with Chinese students. It is so much easier to express thoughts and feelings in Chinese. I enjoyed talking in Chinese with fellow Chinese students, but at the same time I felt guilty since my English language proficiency has not improved as expected. Over the years, the tension between improving my English skills and connecting interpersonally and intrapersonally through one’s native language still haunts me and makes me feel stressed. (Participant 18)

Regarding the strategies used to deal with language difficulties, confirming the survey findings, the follow-up interviews indicated that Chinese students prefer using circumlocution, approximation, and self-solving (e.g., practice language). Students reported that they used the strategy of circumlocution when they did not know a particular English word or forgot the word they wanted to say.

A male electrical engineering student said:

I think the circumlocution strategy is very effective, especially when I do not know much English vocabulary, but I still want to express an idea clearly. I used this strategy very often when I talked about my major with my professors or my colleagues. For example, I needed an electronic equipment for my lab research, but I do not know the English name for the equipment, so I tried to explain what I wanted to get first and described the scenario in detail until the staff got what I wanted. (Participant 7)

Participants also reported they “often” or “always” used the strategy of “approximation” in their daily lives. Most of them believe this strategy to be effective. When they could not remember the exact word or find the appropriate translation of the word they intended to say, they chose to use another word which shared a similar meaning. Some of participants described this strategy as follows:

I think this strategy is effective. I called “cow” instead of “bison” or “buffalo.” I called “veal” “beef.” Sometimes it is important; if you do not do that, you have no way to communicate. (Participant 15)

Some of Chinese students, however, were aware of that approximation strategy could not help them express their ideas very precisely. For instance, a student pointed out:

Approximation just lets somebody understand, but in many cases, it is not precise. It is okay for daily talking, but not good for academics. For instance, I could not find an appropriate word to substitute for the word “culture shock” when I first got here. So, many times, my professors were confused by what I tried to say. (Participant 2)

Besides language barrier, the relationship with academic advisors was also identified as very important to Chinese international students. Students regarded their advisors as the link to the university and their future career. In spite of this, Chinese international students were reluctant to initiate a conversation with their professors, as they were unsure of the norms of student and professor interaction and relationship.

### **Coping Beliefs and Behaviors of Chinese International Students**

Chinese students preferred to cope with their stress by enduring the problem ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), but they also used a wide range of coping strategies. When seeking help from others, they primarily turned to their family ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) or other Chinese students ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). Going to church for religious comfort ( $M = 1.55$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) and consulting a counselor or psychologist for professional help ( $M = 1.31$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) were the least frequently cited resources. No significant differences were observed across genders, ages, majors, and marital status on preferences of help sources and coping strategies.

In terms of communicating with their family in China, the follow-up interviews indicated that many of the younger students frequently use the internet tools such as instant messaging (Hotmail, Yahoo, etc.), Web cameras, and Skype to chat online with their parents and friends. This new style of communication allows for more convenient, cheaper, and more realistic communications. Therefore, it will be easier for the future students, especially for those who are more sophisticated technology users, to keep in touch their families.

Most of respondents did not know how the counseling service works, or they had a hard time telling counselors about their personal problems. Students identified lack of common language and understanding of mental health concepts, as well as fear of stigmatization, as limiting their expression of their psychological needs and stress.

Findings suggest counseling services need to reach out to provide more counseling opportunities for Chinese students. Counselors should try to become more aware of the culture background of Chinese students in order to help the students understand the type of counseling services offered, why they are offered, and how these services could interface with the Chinese students' needs and problems. More discussion will be addressed in the next section.

## Implications

Chinese international students represent the majority of international students in the United States. They are temporary members of American society but face a number of difficulties due to various factors.

Culturally, Chinese students develop a feeling of “social normlessness” and have difficulties adjusting to appropriate behavior and understanding the behavior of others. Academically, Chinese international students feel exceptional pressure placed on them by their families’ and cultures’ expectations to excel academically. Language-related problems and the difference in educational systems between China and the United States, however, posed severe constraints to Chinese students’ academic success at American universities. Facing the strain of language and academic problems, Chinese students feel even more stressed if they fail. Because attaining an advanced degree is a major way for Chinese students to achieve higher status in China or to pursue their dreams in the United States, the potential negative consequences of academic failure are considerable. Psychologically, although studies demonstrated that Chinese students are experiencing more acute distress than other students experience, signs of Chinese students’ stress may not be visible to outsiders as their cultural background tends to camouflage this. Financially, Chinese students have limited financial resources to pursue degrees. Financial anxiety presents a major source of stress to Chinese students struggling for academic success with little assistance from American society. Personally, they reside in marginal status positions in the United States, and many of them learn that it is difficult for them to reach their dreams (finding decent jobs or attaining permanent residency in the United States) due to lack of legitimate access. Visa issues, job opportunities, and immigration concerns were identified as the greatest stressor to Chinese students due to current immigration policy. In addition, dating and marriage issues also pose serious challenges to Chinese international students.

It is important for American university communities to consistently assist in improving Chinese international students’ situations.

### American University Community

As for American university communities, in order to develop an inclusive learning environment and secure Chinese students’ degree completion, one issue is how this community can make the educational experience of students from People’s Republic of China less stressful. If the American academic community wants to be supportive, it needs to increase its cross-cultural awareness, adjust its assumptions and perceptions, and seek additional ways to interact with these students. If the American university community can be aware that Chinese students are very special, and, accordingly, their responses and needs are very different from American students and even different from other international students, Chinese students will feel less stressed in American educational environments.

In addition to the increase their cross-cultural understanding toward students from China, additional support from faculty, students, and staff at American institutions would help as well. As for the language difficulties, the department or college can help to organize some tuition-free or tuition-reduced noncredit English classes or workshops to help Chinese students to overcome their English language deficiencies. Noncredit seminars and classes might be offered during a student's first semester on campus. To deal with other academic problems which are related to the differences between the educational systems of China and the United States, just as Greer (2005) suggested, departments can offer orientation programs, in which instructors explicitly discuss the differences between the American and the Chinese academic cultures that are reflected in the teaching and learning methods and professors' expectations about student academic performance. Also, the different value systems of the American and Chinese cultures should be addressed so that students have a context to understand what they experience in the American university outside of the classroom. Sessions focusing upon the dissimilar academic culture and academic milieu between China and America could shorten the cross-cultural and academic adjustment time of Chinese students.

Moreover, an awareness of more of the services available to students on the campus should be included in orientation programs. As the current study suggested, a large number of Chinese students did not know how the counseling service works. Most of them did not use the counseling services or other student services when they had problems. They usually turned to their family or other Chinese students for help when they were in crisis or in trouble. Also, American universities should provide special workshops and counseling programs for foreign students who suffer behavior and emotional problems associated with their cultural adjustment.

American university should maintain an International Student Affairs Department (International Student Office) with qualified staff to work on foreign student issues. The international student office needs to be increasingly aware of the special problems of Chinese students. Counseling services need to reach out to provide more counseling opportunities to Chinese students. Counselors should become more aware of the culture background of Chinese students in order to help students understand the type of counseling services offered, why they are offered, and how these services could help meet their needs and problems. As the current study revealed, Chinese students favored having a counselor of the same ethnic background. The training and hiring of more qualified Chinese counselors at American universities is an issue worthy of future research.

The current study indicated most Chinese students received limited financial information from their advisors or friends. Various methods should be employed to make sure Chinese students can access as much information on possible financial resources or part-time job opportunities in their departments or colleges as possible.

As Yeh (2000) suggested, American universities should represent foreign students to foster the legitimate interests of foreign students whenever immigration issues are involved. At the same time, the university should be more sensitive to those difficulties which may befall Chinese international students with limited resources.

## Chinese International Students

As for Chinese students, especially those who plan on coming to the United States to pursue studies on temporary student visas, the decision to study abroad should be made with serious consideration. Just as Grinberg and Grinberg (1989) described:

Migration offers opportunities, but like life itself, it is fraught with danger and difficulty, therefore often persecutory in nature. It is full of mourning, remorse, and depression. It is an event of potential trauma and crisis, accompanied by conflicting emotions of leaving for freedom and longing for home and identity (p. 20).

Just as the findings presented in Chap. 4 suggested, life in the United States is not easy, and foreign students have to bear multifaceted stressors. In addition, as the discussion in Chap. 5 illustrated, individual variables such as age, gender, major, marital status, expectations, and predeparture knowledge and skills also influence the types of stressors. Hence, before making the decision to go abroad, Chinese students should carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad. The migratory impulse and the desire for adventure and spatial freedom is part of human nature, but migration might become torture and crisis, if the individual is not ready for the potential stressors and difficulties which befall foreigners with limited resources.

After making the decision to pursue education in the United States, Chinese students should collect more detailed information regarding life and study in the United States. Also, based on the collected information, before leaving home, Chinese students should try to anticipate the potential barriers and problems of studying and living in the United States and then prepare for those potential difficulties psychologically and physically.

For those Chinese students who already came to the United States, in order to successfully function in the American university environment—a setting that contrasts considerably with the academic culture of Chinese universities in terms of instructor-student relationships, professors' expectations, and instructional modes—Chinese students should try to consciously conduct a “deep-structure sociocultural transfer” (Liu 1995; Yan 2006). Making this “deep-structure sociocultural transfer” happen, however, is not easy. According to my pilot study conducted at Arizona State University (2006), Chinese students can be put into two categories based on their various problems. Some of them were not even aware of what the norms of appropriate behaviors in American academic settings are. Due to such ignorance, while they displayed a willingness to conform to American sociocultural norms, their actual behavior did not support such inclination. They still unconsciously follow Chinese mentor-student relationship patterns and have overly high expectations of their American mentors; they remain silent when facing problems either in either their personal study or their work environment. Failure to deal with such problems in a way Americans expect arises from their ignorance about what appropriate behaviors are in American academic settings. One possible reason is that, for Chinese students, the new educational environment is so confusing, ambiguous, and overwhelming that they tend to wrap themselves up in their



academic struggles and appear indifferent to other aspects of academic life on campus. Hinkel (1996) explained that Chinese students may not give high priority to learning appropriate behaviors (strategies), because they narrowly focus on obtaining academic degrees.

In contrast to those who are not aware of appropriate American socio-educational norms, another group of Chinese students present different problems. Although they knew the correct American responses, they still faced great difficulty in automatically responding in the expected way. Their behaviors have been already observed by a culture study, which found that though some nonnative speakers were aware of the behavioral norms in the United States, they were also critical of them when compared to those of their own cultures and often chose not to follow the American norms (Hinkel 1996). For instance, though Chinese students know American instructors would like students to actively participate in class discussions, they doubt the value of discussion and therefore chose to be silent.

For the first type of Chinese students, if they can unwrap themselves from the narrow academic focus and try to deliberately learn appropriate responses and apply them in real-life situations when dealing with American faculty or in classroom settings, their academic challenges might decrease if the deep-structure sociocultural transfer process could be completed sooner.

For the second type of Chinese students, if they do not make judgments or jump to the conclusions too quickly and keep an open mind and try to understand American educational norms first, they would make behavioral adjustment as they began to understand the cultural bases for accepted behaviors (Greer 2005). For instance, after understanding that the social structure in US universities tends to be more egalitarian and informal, which is contrary to the hierarchical and formal ordering of social relationships in China, Chinese students could gradually come to understand how the norms associated with this ordering of relationship are manifested in instructor-student relationship and teaching philosophies. With their increased cross-cultural consciousness, they could better handle when it comes to such challenges as speaking up in class and asking questions. Similarly, after accepting the American cultural core value of individualism as opposed to collectivism in China, they would know that independent stance, in which the individual basically relies upon him- or herself, rather than dependent actions, in which the individual primarily relies upon others, are more appreciated in American academic settings (Greer 2005). Consequently, they would discard the norm that is usually associated with the Chinese culture: relying heavily on an advisor's guidance and discipline. They would take more initiative, be more decisive, professional, and independent when dealing with their American advisors and their research work.

For personal stressors, Chinese students should learn how to flexibly employ different coping strategies to deal with different stressors and try to take advantage of available sources of social support such as parents, friends, advisors, and counseling services. Especially for the counseling services, Chinese students should break away from the cultural stereotype and try to be more open-minded toward counseling concepts and counseling services.

In addition, as for the sociocultural concerns and stressors, Chinese international students should assume the integration acculturation strategy, which has been proved by both previous studies and the current one to be the most effective acculturation strategy.

## Recommendations

The United States is the leading destination country of foreign students. In 2013, students from China represent 29 percent of total number of international students in the United States. According to a study by the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, the 583,000 international students enrolled at US universities in the academic year 2006–2007, along with their dependents, spent nearly \$14.5 billion on tuition, other fees, and living expenses (Bevis & Lucas). By any measure, international education makes a significant contribution to the US economy. By any measure, international education makes a significant contribution to the US economy.

Foreign students' impact on the US economy continues after they graduate. International students who choose to stay in the United States after finishing their degrees become valuable assets—a “stock of intellectual capital”—for their American employers (Bevis and Lucas 2007). Johnson (2001) reported:

Chinese graduate students who earned a Science and Engineering doctorate (21,600) in the United States between 1986 and 1998 conducted basic and applied research in U.S. universities and helped teach students in science, mathematics, and engineering. After earning their degrees, Chinese post-doctorates have contributed to research at U.S. universities and elsewhere. Chinese-born scientists and engineers are part of the U.S. technical labor force, particularly in business and industry. (p. 3–4)

While there has been national-level interest in and recognition of the importance of international students to the United States, national policy efforts have never had a great influence on the practices of individual institutions. Although American universities have kept their doors open and encouraged Chinese students to come, not all educational institutions are prepared to satisfy the special needs of these students. There is still much room for improvement of the services and programs for Chinese students. Based on this study, the following suggestions are recommended for American universities.

### Recommendations for American Universities

1. Universities need to offer more effective orientations to incoming Chinese students. The international student office on campus should provide workshops and seminars that specifically focus on the differences between American and Chinese academic cultures. Also, before starting their programs of study, newly

arrived Chinese students should be required to take short-term cultural and/or language classes in language schools or community colleges. This would provide Chinese students with a context to understand the dissimilar academic culture and milieu and learn the necessary skills they need to successfully function at an American university.

2. Helping Chinese students improve their English proficiency is important. There are several different ways universities could facilitate this improvement: (a) Universities could offer tuition-free or tuition-reduced noncredit English classes during a student's first year on campus; (b) universities could offer English language workshops; and (c) the international student office could create a weekly conversation club where international students would practice their English with native speakers.
3. American universities should maintain an international student affairs department (international student office) with qualified staff to work on Chinese students issues. The international student office needs to be increasingly aware of the special problems of Chinese students. Research has indicated that signs of Chinese students' stress may not be visible to outsiders, as their cultural background tends to camouflage this (Yang and Clum 1994; Yeh 2000). Cultural factors, such as the shame and disgrace associated with admitting to having emotional problems, as well as the handling of problems within the family rather than relying on outside resources, prevent Chinese students from seeking outside help. Counseling services need to reach out to provide more counseling opportunities to Chinese students and especially pay attention to their particular emotional needs such as dating and marriage concerns. Perhaps hiring some Chinese personnel might improve services to Chinese international students.
4. University officials should work together with academic departments and colleges to provide more meaningful social activities to help integrate Chinese international students into university life: happy hour social events, potluck dinners and picnics, hiking and camping outings, and organized campus and shopping tours would be very helpful for Chinese students to experience American social life and gain understanding of the culture. Other support services might include arranging airport pickups and temporary housing for newly arrived students. Establishing an agency to help newly arriving students deal with various problems they might encounter could offset many adjustment hardships.
5. The current study indicates most Chinese students have limited financial resources to pursue degrees. Financial anxiety presents a major source of stress to Chinese students. American universities should consider providing student loans to Chinese international students who may face financial difficulties. Students who demonstrate financial emergencies should be allowed to seek temporary and off-campus employment. Various ways of disseminating information about financial aid to Chinese students should also be employed.
6. American universities should advocate on behalf of Chinese international students to advance the legitimate interests of these students whenever visa and

immigration issues are involved. The current study reveals most Chinese students reside in marginal status positions in the United States, and many of them learn that it is difficult for them to reach their dreams (finding decent jobs or attaining permanent residency in the United States) due to lack of legitimate access. Visa issues, job opportunities, and immigration concerns were identified as the greatest stressor to Chinese students due to current immigration policy. Universities should be more sensitive to the difficulties which may befall Chinese international students struggling to successfully land a job with little assistance in American society. The American university community should be familiar with resources available to Chinese international students and direct Chinese students to take advantage of appropriate resources when they are in trouble.

7. American universities should better publicize the university counseling services by having counseling staff meet students during orientation and inform them of programs and services, both on campus and off, available to international students. Additional training of counseling staff to raise their cultural awareness and take an interest in other cultures, and perhaps hiring some Chinese personnel might improve their services to Chinese international students.
8. Many Chinese students express disappointment in a lack of social interaction with American students. It would be beneficial for American universities to help facilitate communication and interaction between Chinese students and domestic students. Mentoring programs could be established. For instance, upper-class American students could assist newly arrived Chinese students in becoming familiar with the campus and the surrounding community. Various cross-cultural events should be organized periodically with both Chinese and American students encouraged to participate. All of these efforts would serve to help Chinese international students adjust to living in the United States.

#### Recommendations for Professors

1. American professors who work with Chinese international students might be encouraged to develop some knowledge of Chinese students' special problems and needs so that they can be more attentive to Chinese students' difficulties (Lin 1998).
2. Although advisors are not expected to counsel Chinese international students, a familiarity with a student's present life could be helpful. Also, periodically checking on a student's well-being could be an important step in preventing a student from developing problems (Wilson 1996).
3. Advisors should make an effort to assist Chinese international students successfully complete their programs of study. Advisors should be familiar with resources available to international students and direct Chinese students to take advantage of appropriate resources when students are in trouble.

## Recommendations for Chinese International Students

1. Chinese students should practice their English as much as possible before coming to the United States, because English proficiency is essential to their success in American universities.
2. Chinese students and their parents should obtain more comprehensive and accurate predeparture information about life and study in the United States. The current study indicates that thorough preparation for the upcoming adjustments should result in less stress and frustration during the initial weeks and months of their time in the United States. International exposure, such as short-term visits to other countries and working in international corporations, would be very helpful to improve their cross-cultural knowledge, thereby shortening their cultural and academic adjustment time in the United States. Other convenient ways for students to enhance their culturally relevant knowledge and skills while still at home in China include meeting with American students and American families living in or visiting China and watching American movies and documentaries.
3. Chinese international students should obtain as much knowledge as possible of Western theories and terminology in their fields before coming to the United States.
4. When in the United States, Chinese international students should try to socialize and actively participate in the host culture. They should adopt an integration strategy—synthesizing the best elements of both Chinese and American cultural traditions, bridging two cultures, and becoming mediators—to consciously conduct a deep-structure sociocultural transformation (e.g., breaking away from the cultural stereotype and trying to be more open-minded toward counseling concepts and counseling services). This too will help Chinese students alleviate their acculturative stress and shorten their cross-cultural and academic adjustment time.

## Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study outlined here suggest how the study could have been conducted differently.

1. The study is limited to students of a single university. A single research site might hurt the generalization of research findings.
2. The sample size for quantitative study is limited to 60 respondents. The sample was drawn from current students at Arizona State University, and due to the limited time frame, the researcher could not recruit more subjects. Later research might enlarge the sample size to one hundred or more so as to make the quantitative study more convincing and reliable.

3. In order to facilitate the flow of the discussion, the current quantitative study did not specifically address the individual variability. The data was treated as if all the subjects who believed this or that were the same, but they were not. The relatively large standard deviations around a mean value suggest that individual differences are numerous. Future study should pay attention to the variability of the subjects.
4. The interviews were conducted in the Chinese language then translated to English. Although utmost care was made to translate the meanings of the interviews from Mandarin Chinese to English, trivial inaccuracies created through translation might still exist.
5. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with a single researcher. Later research might consider using additional interviewers, which might provide cross- interviewer reliability.

## Chapter 10

# Implications for Future Research

This chapter mainly addresses the implications for future research. Based on the statement of limitations of this research and earlier interpretations and discussions, future research should address at least the following three issues:

1. Future studies could follow different research designs. For example, it is clear that international students from countries other than China also suffer stress in the United States and future projects should compare and contrast samples of foreign students from different cultures residing in the United States. Studies can research the relationship between the culture and stress and coping behaviors. This could be done at a single university which has a large foreign student population. Further incorporating a variety of international students groups should prove helpful in enhancing the richness of the data.

Schwartz's (1987) study provided a starting point for future research. Schwartz studied the relationship between culture and stress. She compared Chinese international graduate students, Saudi Arabian international graduate students, and American graduate students regarding their perceptions of problems encountered in daily life and their preferred coping strategies. The results of the study showed that individuals from different cultures tend to identify different types of events as stressful and to appraise these events differently. Students also report using different types of coping strategies.

2. A longitudinal or follow-up study should be conducted at a later date, when the interview respondents are more settled. In other words, the research can easily be continued in a number of years and would provide longitudinal accounts which are not available in current literature. After the respondents have put their university days behind them, they may reveal, in greater detail, the stress and anxiety they felt while they were students, how they adapted, how they coped with their stress, and how they lived up to the expectations of their families in China. They might be more candid about their difficulties they faced as students, after they have become permanent residents or United States citizens. The study

can also compare the different stressors they encountered as students, who temporarily reside in America, and as immigrants, who tend to work and live permanently in the United States.

3. Regarding the American dream, stress and coping, job concerns, and other immigration issues, future projects might also conduct a comparison study on different groups such as predeparture students, students who are currently enrolled in American universities, those who have graduated from American universities and have settled in the United States for several years, and those who have finished their degree in the United States and returned home. This comparison study could reveal how students' perceptions change over time and what role foreign study plays in students' future social economic status, which could be upward or downward.



# Appendices

## Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

1. How often is each of the following factors making you feel depressed or stressed in United States? (from 1—seldom to 5—very often).

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Financial difficulties                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) English language barrier                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Academic pressure                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Loneliness and homesickness                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (e) Job opportunities/visa problems/immigration issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (f) Culture shock                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (g) Pressure from dating or marriage                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (h) Other (please specify)                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

2. How often do you do the following things when you feel depressed or stressed? (from 1—seldom to 5—very often).

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Calling parents in China               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Turning to a friend here for help      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Endurance (tolerance)                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Taking-it-easy and letting it happen   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (e) Consulting a counselor or psychologist | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (f) Going to church for religious comfort  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (g) Other (please specify)                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. To what extent do you perceive it as a challenge at American academic settings? (from 1—not a challenge at all to 5—critical challenge).
- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Classroom interactions<br>(speaking up/making presentations/asking questions) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Understanding the lectures  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Student-advisor relationship  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Writing research-based papers   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (e) Adjusting to the American academic environments                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
4. How often do you use the following strategies to overcome your academic difficulties? (from 1—seldom to 5—very often).
- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Increasing reading after class to compensate for weakness in listening comprehension during lectures  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Anticipating and preparing to avoid potential problems  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Observing American academic settings and American students to make behavior adjustment (behavior adjustment means incorporating the conduct that is generally linked to the American culture into their available behaviors and discarding the behaviors that is related with Chinese culture if they prove to hinder their academic success) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Seeking advices and suggestions from friends  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (e) Practicing English  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (f) Spending more time studying to enhance academic strength  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
5. To what extent do you perceive it a challenge when it comes to social life on American campus? (from 1—not a challenge at all to 5—critical challenge).
- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Making good friends with Americans  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Successfully communicating with Americans   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Knowing how to participate, how to behave in an American social situation ( e.g. happy hour)        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Accepting American socio-cultural values such as individualism, competitiveness, and assertiveness. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. How important is each of the following factors in motivating you to study hard in U.S. (from 1—not important to 5—very important)
- (a) Good grades bring the feeling of self-esteem 1 2 3 4 5
  - (b) High expectation from parents 1 2 3 4 5
  - (c) Feeling guilty about parental sacrifices 1 2 3 4 5
  - (d) Social comparison with other Chinese students in terms of educational achievement 1 2 3 4 5
  - (e) Education is the only hope for social acceptance and financial security in the U.S. 1 2 3 4 5
7. How often is each of the following scenarios making you feel depressed or stressful (from 1—seldom to 5—very often)?
- (a) Casual chatting with Americans who seem unable to get what you are talking about 1 2 3 4 5
  - (b) Making a presentation in a classroom where majority audience are native speakers 1 2 3 4 5
  - (c) Talking to your advisor while worrying about your actual academic capability will be crippled by your English proficiency then probably leave bad impressions on your advisors 1 2 3 4 5
  - (d) Writing research-based papers, which will be evaluated by American faculties 1 2 3 4 5
8. How important is each of the following factors in explaining your language difficulties? (from 1—not important to 5—very important)
- (a) The influence of Chinese language (e.g. Chinglish expressions, Chinese plus English, are commonly used). 1 2 3 4 5
  - (b) Lack of contextual knowledge or cultural background (e.g. unable to understand slang or idiom). 1 2 3 4 5
  - (c) Inadequate language training 1 2 3 4 5
  - (d) Infrequent chances to practice English 1 2 3 4 5
  - (e) Language demands are various across majors. The language demand is pretty high in my major 1 2 3 4 5

9. How often do you use each of the following strategies to deal with the language difficulties? (from 1—seldom to 5—very often)
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Self-solving (e.g. language practice)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Clarification request (ask for repetition)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Confirmation check<br>(e.g. check with friends or teachers to confirm what you understand is right)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Approximation<br>(e.g. when you forget a word you intended to say, you use another word which shared a similar meaning)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (e) Circumlocution<br>(e.g. when you do not know a word you wanted to say, you express the meaning of this word by describing and explaining)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (f) Appeal for assistance<br>(e.g. when you wanted to express some words you did not know, you might give some information first and then appeal for assistance from the native speaker) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (g) Keeping quiet to avoid problems  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (h) Smiling and pretending to understand   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
10. How important are the following factors in explaining the financial stress of Chinese students in the U. S.? (from 1—not important to 5—very important)
- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Wide gap between the income level of China and that of the United States, it is nearly impossible for Chinese parents to finance their children in the U.S. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Low exchange rate of Chinese Yuan to US dollars   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) As international students, Chinese students are not allowed to seek off-campus employment   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Lack of financial support mechanisms (e.g. student loans available to American students often are not as relevant or as available to Chinese students).     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (e) Financial pressures are varied across majors. It is difficult for me to acquire assistantship in my department  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

11. To what extent is each of the following strategies you used or will consider to use to beat financial pressure in the U.S.? (from 1—seldom to 5—very often)
- (a) The availability of financial support rather than academic reputation is the first concern while choosing American universities to study 1 2 3 4 5
  - (b) Transferring majors to wherever financial aid was available, if there is no financial support provided by current majors 1 2 3 4 5
  - (c) Seeking off-campus jobs, even it is illegal to do so 1 2 3 4 5
  - (d) Securing the teaching or research assistantship 1 2 3 4 5
  - (e) Living a modest life by cutting budget on living expenses such as lodging, automobile or health insurance, dress, social activities, etc. 1 2 3 4 5
12. To what extent is each of the following statements true to describe your job opportunities, visa status, and immigration concerns? (from 1—not true to 5—very true)
- (a) I am planning to stay in the U.S. and find a job after I finish my degree program 1 2 3 4 5
  - (b) I think F1 student visa will be a barrier to my employment in the U.S. 1 2 3 4 5
  - (c) I feel stressed about the fact that my F1 visa will expire and I have to leave U.S., if I am unable to find a job within a year after my graduation. 1 2 3 4 5
  - (d) I dare not to go back to China during vacations, because I am afraid that I can not get visa once I am in China. I feel very depressed. 1 2 3 4 5
  - (e) I feel stressed about my future job opportunities in the U.S. 1 2 3 4 5
  - (f) I feel stressed about my future job opportunities in China

13. To what extent is each of the following statements true to describe your acculturation strategy? (from 1—not true to 5—very true)
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Assimilation strategy<br>(I do not want to maintain Chinese culture and seek daily interaction with American culture)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Separation strategy<br>(I hold on to Chinese culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with American culture)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Integration strategy<br>(I try to assimilate the best elements of both Chinese and American cultural traditions).  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (d) Marginalization strategy<br>(I feel vacillate between Chinese culture and American culture, identifying with neither, nor for that matter being accepted in either). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
14. How often do you use each of the following strategies as coping strategies? (from 1—seldom to 5—very often).
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) Problem-focused coping<br>(attempting to change or solve the problem)                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (b) Emotion-focused coping<br>(attempting to regulate the emotions associated with the problem)                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (c) Avoidance-oriented coping<br>(attempting to make anticipation and preparation to avoid potential problems) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

### ***Demographic Data Form***

1. Age: \_\_\_ Below 25 \_\_\_ 26-31 \_\_\_ 32 or older
2. Gender: \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female
3. Academic classification: \_\_\_ Doctoral \_\_\_ Master
4. Marital Status: \_\_\_ Single \_\_\_ Married
5. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How long have you been in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
7. Current Grade Point Average (GPA)? \_\_\_ 2.5–2.9 \_\_\_ 3.0–3.4 \_\_\_ 3.5–4.0

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. Regarding the general life stress, the following questions will be asked.
  - (1) Do you think you suffer from any stress?
  - (2) If so, what would you say is the most stressful about your life in the U.S.?
  - (3) When did it start?
  - (4) How would you characterize your stress?
  - (5) What conditions do you believe tend to account for your stress?
  - (6) How do you handle the stress over time?
  - (7) What suggestions would you make to other Chinese students who face the same stress issue?
2. In terms of the specific stressors, the following questions will be asked.
  - (1) Financial concerns
    - (a) Do you worry about your financial situation?
    - (b) Do your financial concerns affect your academic performance?
    - (c) If so, how do you handle your financial problems? What are the possible solutions?
  - (2) Cultural adjustment
    - (a) Do you always feel lonely or homesick?
    - (b) Do you feel cultural adjustments related to your stress? Do you experience cultural difficulties in the U.S.?
    - (c) Do you feel social isolation?
    - (d) If so, how do you handle this kind of issue?
  - (3) Language barrier
    - (a) Do you feel language barrier in your daily communication or your study?
    - (b) Do you feel language barrier related to your stress?
    - (c) If so, how do you manage handle the language barrier?
  - (4) Academic concerns
    - (a) Are you doing well in your study? How do you feel about your academic progress?
    - (b) Does your study relate to your stress?
    - (c) If so, how do you manage this kind of problem?
  - (5) Visa concerns
    - (a) Do you worry about your U.S. visa status?
    - (b) Do you plan to stay in the U.S. and find a job after graduation?

- (c) If yes, do you believe your U.S. F1 student visa will be a barrier to your employment in the U.S.? Does your U.S. visa concern relate to your stress?
  - (d) If yes, how do you handle the visa problem?
- (6) Dating and marriage
- (a) Do you have any dating and marriage problems?
  - (b) Do you feel dating or marriage related to your stress?
  - (c) If so, how do you manage this problem?
- (7) Others
- (a) Besides the above concerns, what other perspectives of your life contribute to your stress in the U.S.?
  - (b) Probe: could you explain to me by some detailed examples? How do you handle it?
3. As for the coping strategies and support mechanism, the following questions have been addressed.
- (1) Whom do you usually turn to for help in time of trouble or psychological depressed?
  - (2) What would you say are those factors stimulating you to study hard or give you courage to overcome the difficulties?
  - (3) What are those specific strategies you used in your life or study to deal with the stress?
  - (4) What suggestions would you make about how to improve the services and programs for Chinese international students in the United States?



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