

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FRIENDSHIP BY CHINESE
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN
THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

by

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Currently the number of international students at higher education institutions in the United States is at an all-time high at nearly one million. International students play a vital role in internationalizing college campuses across America and provide opportunities for American college students to have meaningful interaction with students from different countries and cultures with whom they would not otherwise have the opportunity to interact. As intercultural competence is one of the main goals of internationalization, meaningful intercultural interaction is essential. Unfortunately, many international students struggle to build friendships with American students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how Chinese international students, at one particular university, conceptualize friendship. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, I interviewed 33 participants and analyzed the data using initial, focused, and theoretical coding. The findings suggest that Chinese students usually allow friendships to slowly develop over an extended period of time, but once the friendships have formed, they last for a long time. Moreover, I found that reciprocity, in the form of gift giving and helping, was an essential part of friendship maintenance. I also found that the group mentality was an important aspect of friendship.

Because of the differences in regards to friendship formation and maintenance, Chinese and American students may have difficulty becoming friends. By understanding how Chinese students perceive friendship, higher education administrators, particularly those in student affairs, may be able to offer more assistance and guidance on how to become friends with

Americans—provided the Chinese students want to make friends and welcome the advice.

Possible practical implications of this research include seminars on cultural differences and structured on-campus events that encourage meaningful intercultural interaction.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of Granddad.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Previous scholarship in the area of student affairs has established that having friends while in college is an important part of student development (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). Furthermore, some researchers have shown the benefits of international students and American students being friends with each other (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Kisang, 2010; Li & Gasser, 2005; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Olaniran, 1993; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Yeh & Inose, 2003). However, previous research has also shown that international students often have difficulty building friendships with American students (Akanawa, 2015; Kusek, 2015; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Neri & Ville, 2008; Razek & Coyner, 2013; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010), and among international students, those from Asian countries especially have difficulty (Brown, 2009; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). While there have been studies to establish friendship patterns (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Brown, 2009; Chavajay, 2013; Tsai & Wong, 2012) and studies that suggest having American friends helps with the cultural adjustment process (Hirai, Frazier, & Syed, 2015; Lin, 2012; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), there have yet to be any studies that examine how international students conceptualize friendship. Such studies could be important to understanding both why international and American students experience difficulty forming friendships and how to overcome said difficulty. The implications of understanding the

concept of friendship and the experience of making American friends could be the development or improvement of campus programs that encourage meaningful intercultural interaction.

Studying friendship building between international and American university students is significant because of the vital role international students play in internationalizing college campuses in the United States. Internationalization is defined as “the conscious effort to integrate and infuse international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the philosophy of postsecondary education” (NAFSA, 2016). Recruiting international students is one of the ways universities strive to internationalize (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Dewey & Duff, 2009; Kreber, 2009), and one of the main goals of internationalization is to develop intercultural competence among students (Deardorff, 2006; Dewey & Duff, 2009; Eisenclas & Trevakkes, 2007; Kreber, 2009). However, simply recruiting international students is not enough to ensure intercultural competence; there must be meaningful interaction between American students and international students (Brewer, 1996; Nesdale & Todd, 2000; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). For these reasons, understanding how international students conceptualize friendship, the difficulties they encounter when trying to form friendships with Americans, and the strategies they use to form friendship is important.

It is especially important to more closely examine friendships among Chinese international students and American students. First, China is the leading country of origin for international students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2015). Second, researchers (Bista, 2015; Cross, 1995) have noted that Asian international students, Chinese students among them, tend to have a more difficult time adjusting to the cultural differences in America than do international students from other areas of the world. Third, researchers (Brown, 2009; Hendrickson, et al., 2011) have also found that students from Asia are more likely to from

friendships with people from their own country. Finally, while many researchers (Du & Wei, 2015; Wang, Heppner, Wan, & Zhu, 2015; Wang, Wei, & Chen, 2015) who have specifically studied Chinese international students have concluded that it is beneficial for Chinese students to have American friends, a study has not been conducted on how Chinese students conceptualize friendship.

Background

For several reasons, higher education institutions in the United States should be attentive to international students. First, their numbers are growing: in the 2014-15 academic year, there were 974,926 international students studying at higher education institutions across America, which marked a 10% increase from the year before and was a record high (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2015). Over a sixty-six year period¹, the number of international students has grown, starting with 25,464 in 1948 and increasing to nearly one million in 2014 (IIE, 2015; See Figure 1.1). Second, their presence has an economic effect on a university and the city in which the university is. In fact, international students contributed 30.5 billion dollars to the United States' economy in 2014 (IIE, 2015). Moreover, international students pay out-of-state tuition and are generally not eligible for federal assistance; consequently they bring more revenue to the institution without taking federal dollars away from American students (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Ferren & Merrill, 2013; Kreber, 2009).

Third, international students play a vital role in making campuses more diverse and giving students a chance to interact with people from around the world (Brewer, 1996; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). National students can increase their intercultural competence when they

¹ Beginning in 1919, the Institute of International Education has conducted an annual census of international students in the United States; however, the census data that is available to the public covers the years 1948 to 2014.

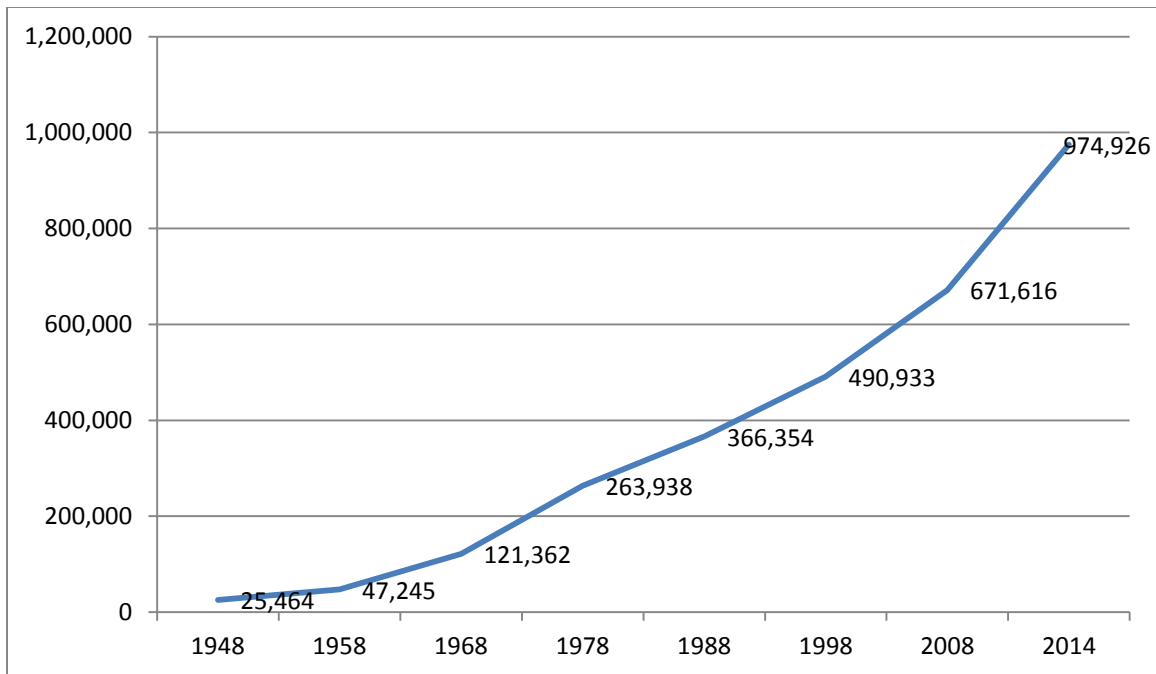


Figure 1.1. International students in the U.S. 1948 – 2014. Adapted from IIE (2015).

interact more with international students (Jon, 2013), and both international and American students have reported gaining confidence through cross-cultural friendships (Perkins, 2004).

Moreover, American students have stated that through befriending an international student they learned that the stereotypes that they had previously believed were incorrect and that each international student should be viewed as an individual (Geelhoed, Abe, & Talbot, 2003). They also became more empathetic, changed their overall perspective of international students, learned about other cultures, and improved their language skills (Geelhoed, et al., 2003). Deardorff (2006) distributed a questionnaire amongst administrators and faculty to learn how they defined and understood internationalization. She found that most of the participants agreed that the main goal of internationalization was to teach students to be interculturally competent. The presence of international students on campuses provides the opportunities for American students to interact with people from other countries and cultures. However, in order for students to gain

intercultural competence, there needs to be meaningful interaction between people of different cultures.

Among the international student population, Chinese international students are a group to which higher education institutions should pay special attention. Chinese students make up a significant proportion of international students. In fact, thirty-one percent of international students in the United States in the 2014-15 academic year came from China (IIE, 2015). Moreover, China has been the leading place of origin for international students since 2009, and the number of Chinese students coming to America has been steadily increasing over the last eight years (IIE, 2015; See Table 1.1). The first Chinese student who graduated from an

Table 1.1

Number of Chinese international students in the U.S. from 1997 to 2015

Academic Year	Number of Students From China	Percent Change from Previous Year
2014-15	304,040	10.8%
2013-14	274,439	16.5%
2012-13	235,597	21.4%
2011-12	194,029	23.1%
2010-11	157,558	23.5%
2009-10	127,628	29.9%
2008-09	98,235	21.1%
2007-08	81,127	19.8%
2006-07	67,723	8.2%
2005-06	62,582	0.1%
2004-05	62,523	1.2%
2003-04	61,765	-4.6%
2002-03	64,757	2.4%
2001-02	63,211	5.5%
2000-01	59,939	10.0%
1999-00	54,466	6.8%
1998-99	51,001	8.6%
1997-98	46,958	10.5%

Note. Adapted from IIE (2015).

American university was Yung Wing, who completed a degree at Yale in 1854 (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). In 1868, the United States and China signed the Burlingame Treaty, a peace treaty that opened up the opportunity for more Chinese students to come to America. From 1872 to 1881, several Chinese students enrolled at universities in the U.S., but in the late 1870s and early 1880s the political relations between China and America began to deteriorate. Consequently, for several years few Chinese students came to the United States. Then in the early 1900s there was a reemergence of students from China (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). The number of Chinese students grew steadily throughout most of the 20th century (Bevis & Lucas, 2007) and then grew drastically in the 1980s (IIE, 2015). This growth in the 1980s is said to be directly related to China's "open door policy" (Li, 2005), which opened up trade between China and other countries (Huan, 1984). Liu (2015) explains that statesman Deng Xiaopeng's economic reform and the open door policy allowed many families to afford to send their college-aged children to study abroad. By the academic year 1988-89, China had become the leading place of origin for international students (IIE, 2015). From 1994– 1997, Japan was the leading sender, but China once again took first place in 1998 (IIE, 2015). While the number of Chinese students continued to increase, the number from India increased even more. In fact, from 2001– 2008, India was the leading place of origin (IIE, 2015). However, since the fall semester of 2009 China has been the leading sender of international students to the United States (IIE, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The number of Chinese students in the United States is not the only reason this particular population is of interest: Chinese people are typically interdependent, while Americans are more independent (Cross, 1995; Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This cultural difference can make adjusting to the culture in America and making American friends

difficult (Cross, 1995; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Additionally, in a few studies (Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003) researchers have concluded that students from Asian countries experienced more culture related stress than did international students from European countries, and other researchers (Brown, 2009; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011) have shown that Asian students self-segregate more than other international students do.

Universities should strive to understand the unique needs of Chinese international students studying at institutions of higher education in the United States and seek to meet these needs. All college students face challenges when they make the transition from high school to higher education. International students face many of those same challenges, but they also have challenges that are distinctive to them (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & van Horn, 2002; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007), particularly when it comes to friendship development. Because international students are not from the United States, they have the additional difficulty of not understanding American culture—both the culture in general and the academic culture. Also, while many Americans may have a social network of friends and family close by that can support them, international students have left their network behind in their country (Pedersen, 1991; Yeh & Inose, 2003), which can make living in America difficult.

Having friends is an important part of student development. Several scholars in the area of student affairs have established that being involved on campus, which includes interacting with and being friends with other people, is essential to student development (Astin, 1984; Chicerking & Gamson, 1987; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). Moreover, researchers have also specifically looked at the importance of friendships among international and American students. For example, Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) conducted a quantitative study that indicated that international

students use their friendships with Americans to help them navigate the new culture they are in. Similarly, several researchers have shown that time spent with American friends leads to cultural adaptation (Hirai, Frazier, & Syed, 2015; Kisang, 2010; Li & Gasser, 2005; Lin, 2012; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Surdam & Collins, 1984) or to a decrease in cultural stress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Olaniran, 1993; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yet, one of the most common complaints from international students is that they do not have American friends (Gareis, 1995), and one of their biggest fears is not being able to make friends (Kwon, 2009). In fact, through several studies researchers have shown that international students struggle with making friends with American students (Akanawa, 2015; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Ramsay, et al., 2007; Razek & Coyner, 2013; Sherry et al., 2010).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how Chinese international students conceptualize the phenomenon of friendship, especially as it relates to their experience forming friendships with American students while studying in the United States. This goal was accomplished through conducting a constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2014) and by constructing a theory on Chinese students' conceptualization of friendship. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do Chinese students conceptualize the phenomenon of friendship?
2. What are the challenges that Chinese students face when becoming friends with Americans?
3. How do Chinese students strive to overcome those challenges?

Significance

As a result of a better understanding of the international student experience and friendship formation, higher education administrators may be able to develop programs, or improve existing programs, that are geared toward increasing meaningful intercultural interaction on college campuses. This interaction is beneficial for international students, who acclimate to the culture better with the help of friends (Bochner et al., 1977; Kisang, 2010; Li & Gasser, 2005; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Yeh & Inose, 2003), as well as American students, who increase their intercultural competence through having international friends (Geelhoed, Abe, & Talbot, 2003; Jon, 2013; Perkins, 2004).

The theory that was constructed as a result of this study may be significant to higher education administrators because it could inform their practice as it relates to developing programs to increase intercultural interaction and intercultural competence. Additionally, it may be significant to Chinese international students because they could benefit from the programs that administrators develop. Finally, at institutions that prioritize internationalization, it may be significant to upper level administrators because increased intercultural interaction and intercultural competence are two of the purposes of internationalization.

Furthermore, this study adds to the literature on international students' friendships because as of yet there have been no studies on the Chinese student conceptualization of friendship. Studies have been conducted on the benefits of international and American student friendships (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Kisang, 2010; Li & Gasser, 2005; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Olaniran, 1993; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Yeh & Inose, 2003), and several researchers have concluded that international students struggle to build meaningful relationships with Americans (Akanawa, 2015; Brown, 2009; Kusek, 2015; Lefdahl-

Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Neri & Ville, 2008; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). However, a study has not yet been conducted on how Chinese students conceptualize friendship.

Overview of the Methodology

The design for this study is constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014); thus, a theory on the Chinese conceptualization of friendship formation was constructed from the ground up, meaning it was constructed from the data. Data collection methods consisted of one-on-one interviews and a focus group interview with Chinese international students and observations of existing programs that were designed to encourage intercultural interaction. Data analysis involved coding the interview transcripts and fieldnotes using initial, focused, and theoretical coding.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provided background information and introduced the problem. It also explained the purpose and significance of the study and gave a brief overview of the methodology. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature, which is divided into major categories and subcategories for ease of reading. The third describes the methodology and the rationale for choosing that approach. It also includes an explanation of the data collection and analysis methods, as well as the site selection. The fourth chapter presents the results of the study, and in the fifth and final chapter I present my interpretations and conclusions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the literature is divided into four main categories: the difficulties international students encounter, acculturation, friendship, and East Asian students. Within each category, the literature is further divided into subcategories. For example, within the friendship category, there are two subcategories: friendship patterns and the benefits of friendship. In this chapter I discuss the existing studies on international students to provide context for the study as well as point to a gap in the literature.

Difficulties in General

The first category within which previous studies are situated is the difficulties international students encounter. All students at higher education institutions may face challenges, but there are some which are unique to international students. According to the literature, which is discussed below, the difficulties include the struggle of communicating in a foreign language, cultural differences, discrimination, and financial problems.

For many international students English is not their native language, thus their level of proficiency can have an effect on how confident they feel, how well they perform in class, and how much they interact with American students. Based on the results of a survey completed by 349 international students at a Midwestern university (Banjong, 2015), English proficiency is the most difficult challenge international students encounter while in college in the United States. In other studies researchers have made similar findings: For example, in a phenomenological study of twelve graduate international students, participants shared in their interviews that they felt

nervous about doing presentations in class (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). In one case study at a university in the Southeast (Lin, 2012) all the participants expressed that they struggled academically because of the language barrier. Additionally, Andrade (2007) conducted a qualitative study with 17 participants and found that international students have trouble participating in class and that it takes them a long time to do their homework because English is their second language. Likewise, the results of a questionnaire completed by 165 international students (Kwon, 2009) indicated that students often feel intimidated because English is not their first language and thus have difficulty speaking in class.

Brown (2009) also emphasizes the challenge of speaking in a second-language, saying “Self-expression was only truly possible in the native language: speaking in English was not only difficult; it was alienating” (p. 189). In Brown’s (2009) ethnographic study of friendship, several participants mentioned how difficult communicating in English is and how they choose to speak their native language whenever possible. Sovic (2009) also notes that international students had trouble communicating: in her qualitative study which compared the experiences of 141 first-year international with 21 American students’ experiences, the majority of non-native English speaking participants expressed that they had problems communicating in English, even those who had high scores on English proficiency exams. In Sherry, Thomas, and Chui’s (2010) study, many participants expressed they had difficulty with English. Sherry et al. distributed a survey with both open-ended and close-ended questions at the University of Toledo. Several of the participants who had difficulty with the English language emphasized that writing for classes was not a problem, but speaking English was. Likewise, participants in Zhang’s (2016) qualitative study of ten Chinese international students at a Midwestern university explained that

they struggled speaking and understanding spoken English. This struggle made it difficult for the participants to make friends with American students.

In addition, in one study (Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015) researchers found a correlation between self-perceived English language proficiency and GPA, with participants who perceived their English skills to be higher having higher GPAs than students who perceived their skills to be lower. This finding was based on statistical analysis of 54 students' responses to a survey. Furthermore, Lee and Rice (2007) found in their case study that students felt discriminated against because their English was not very good or because the professors could not understand their accents. Mukminin and McMahon (2013) also point out that the Indonesian participants in their study felt nervous in class because English was not their first language; however, they also note that the students gained confidence after the first semester and could participate more. An increase in language proficiency helps students gain confidence (Andrade, 2007), which can lead to greater participation both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGoven's (2015) grounded theory study of female Saudi international students noted that English proficiency was a major factor in cultural adjustment.

Language skills are not the only factor that affects students' level of participation. Cultural differences can also stand in the way. As Andrade (2007) points out, American classrooms usually emphasize active participation, while many other cultures tend to be more passive. In Lin's (2012) case study, most participants explained that the different teaching style in America affected their academic performance. Valdez (2015) also notes that at American universities asking questions and contributing to the discussion is encouraged, contrary to Chinese classrooms where students tend to listen silently to lectures. If participation is part of

their class grade, their grades might suffer because they have difficulty participating. The Chinese participants in Valdez's (2015) qualitative study noted that they preferred active, participatory classes, but expressed that they had difficulty joining the discussion because they lacked the cultural background knowledge that the American students had. Participants in Zhang's (2016) phenomenological study said something similar: they found it challenging to participate in the class discussion, even when they knew it would affect their participation grade. Similarly, Mukminin and McMahon (2013) also mention that the students in their study had to first adapt to the different classroom dynamics before they were comfortable participating in discussions. Even meeting with professors or advisors during their office hours can be difficult for international students if they are from a country where speaking with faculty outside of class is not the norm (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013), so this is another area where they must learn to adapt.

Another researcher (Leong, 2015) explored a few other academic cultural differences. Participants in Leong's (2015) qualitative study explained that in American colleges, students are expected to be more responsible than in Chinese colleges. For example, one participant noted that in China the professors constantly remind the students when an assignment is due, but in America students are expected to keep track of due dates and deadlines themselves. Moreover, Leong's participants noted that in China undergraduates tend to have cohorts of students who take all their courses together, which is contrary to what it is like on American campuses for undergraduates.

In addition to encountering a new culture, international students sometimes experience a feeling of loss associated with leaving behind their home country and culture. Wang, Wei, Zhao, Chuang, and Li (2015) surveyed international students at several universities in the United States

using an online survey consisting of the Cross-Cultural Loss Scale. They found that the greater the feeling of loss, the less confident and the less connected to the host culture students felt.

Another difficulty that many international students face is discrimination. In their quantitative study that compared American and international students, Glass and Westmont (2014) found that the international participants felt more discriminated against than the American students felt discriminated against. They also found that students who felt discriminated against lacked a sense of belongingness, which in turn affected their academic success and cross-cultural interaction. Meaning, the greater the feeling of discrimination, the lower the sense of belonging; furthermore, students who felt as though they did not belong performed worse academically and interacted less cross-culturally.

Valdez (2015) also found in her study of Chinese international students that there was a perception of discrimination among the participants. Discrimination manifested itself in a number of ways, including stereotypes about Chinese students cheating, Chinese students not being called on in class, and American students not wanting to do group work with Chinese students. Zhang (2016), like Valdez (2015), noted that her participants expressed that they often felt ignored or overlooked in class by both professors and other students. Additionally, international students in Sullivan and Kashubeck-West's (2015) quantitative study reported higher rates of marginalization than did immigrant students, and participants in Hotta and Ting-Toomey's (2013) qualitative study on the intercultural adjustment of international students also reported feeling marginalized.

Another issue that is related to marginalization is the feeling of being misunderstood. In Sherry, Thomas, and Chui's (2010) study, in which they distributed a survey to international students at the University of Toledo, 60% of the participants expressed that they felt like their

culture was misunderstood by Americans. The Chinese participants especially noted that they were misunderstood, and the Muslim students stated that Americans did not understand their religious beliefs and values.

Finally, another difficulty that is mentioned throughout the literature on international students is financial troubles. Sherry et al. (2010) reported that over half of their participants claimed they had financial problems. Lin (2012) also found that only half of her participants had assistantships—possibly because half of the participants were graduate students and half were undergraduates. Most of Lin’s participants worried about their finances, and even a few of those students with assistantships had to seek additional work to pay for the cost of living in the United States.

To sum up, in this section, I examined literature in which the authors described the difficulties international students encounter. These difficulties include the language barrier, cultural differences, discrimination, and financial troubles. The results of the studies described here indicate that many international students encounter challenges and difficulties when they come to America. Moreover, one might logically conclude that these difficulties could hinder friendship formation. For example, if an international student struggles expressing him- or herself in English, he or she would probably also struggle to make English speaking friends. Furthermore, without a network of friends to provide support, these difficulties could feel exacerbated.

Cultural Adaptation

Another one of the major themes of the studies on international students is cultural adaptation, which is sometimes also referred to as acculturation. When compared to American students, international students have a more difficult time adjusting to college, according to a few

studies (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & van Horn, 2002; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007). This difficulty is likely because in addition to making the transition from high school to university, international students also have the added complication of moving to a new country and speaking a second language. International participants in both of those studies (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002; Ramsay, et al., 2007) reported having less social support than did American students, which likely contributed to the adjustment difficulties. The study conducted by Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) was a longitudinal study in which both American and international students filled out a survey at three different points in time. Ramsay et al. (2007) also used a survey and compared the responses of American and international students.

One of the earliest studies that dealt with the adaptation of international students in the United States was conducted by Surdam and Collins (1984). The two researchers hypothesized that international students' satisfaction over time follows a U-shaped curve (See Figure 2.1). In

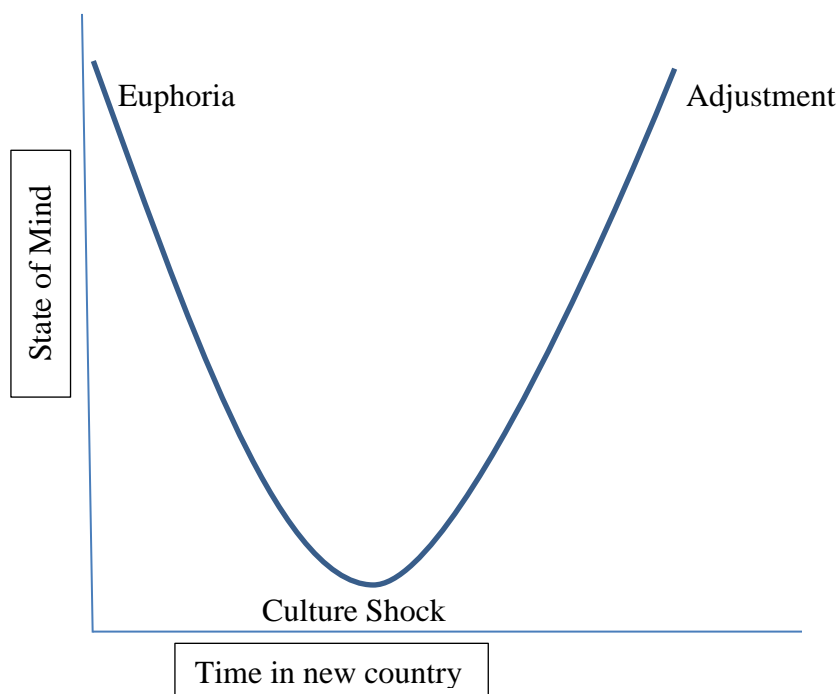


Figure 2.1. The U-Curve Hypothesis

other words, newly arrived international students tend to feel satisfied with their new life in America, students who have been in the United States for a longer period of time (2 to 4 years) feel less satisfied, and those who have been in the States for four or more years are satisfied. This hypothesis was originally put forth by Lysgaard (1955), who conjectured that sojourners experience feelings of euphoria when they first arrive in a foreign country, which is followed later by feelings of disorientation or culture shock, and then by feelings of belonging or cultural adaptation. Lysgaard's participants were Norwegian Fulbright Scholars, some of whom were students, but many were teachers or scientists. Surdam and Collins (1984) wanted to test Lysgaard's hypothesis specifically on international students. After they analyzed the results of a questionnaire that was distributed amongst international students at a state university in the Rocky Mountain region, they concluded that the findings supported the U-curve hypothesis.

Since then, other researchers have tested or adapted the U-curve hypothesis. For example, Senyshyn, Warford, and Zhan (2000) suggested that the curve should look more like a Nike symbol, meaning the final point on the curve is higher than the first point. These three researchers surveyed undergraduate students at the University of Tennessee and found that responses to some of the survey questions supported the U-curve hypothesis. However, responses to questions dealing with difficulty of adjustment seemed to align more with a Nike shape because students were better adjusted toward the end of their college years than at the beginning.

More recently, the U-curve hypothesis has been tested by Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) and Hirai, Frazier, and Syed (2015). Hotta and Ting-Toomey took a qualitative approach, interviewing international students at a university in Southern California. In addition to asking interview questions, Hotta and Ting-Toomey asked participants to draw their own curve on a

piece of graph paper, with the *x*-axis representing time and the *y*-axis representing the participants' level of satisfaction with their adjustment to the United States. Most participants drew a line indicating an upward trend over time, a few drew a line indicating a downward trend, and the rest drew curves the authors described as "multiple M-shaped," "one-hill," "W-shaped," "multiple W-shaped," and a "sideways S" (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013, pp. 563-565).

Hirai et al. (2015) tested the U-curve hypothesis by conducting a five-wave longitudinal quantitative study. International students at a university in the Midwest took an online survey at five different points in time during one academic year. Hirai et al. concluded that international students' adjustment did not follow a U-shaped trajectory. Instead, they noticed that many students have difficulty with adjustment immediately upon arrival in the United States, as opposed to feeling a sense of euphoria early on and then experiencing culture shock later. This finding is similar to what Sherry et al. (2010) noted: their participants who expressed that they had difficulty adjusting to American culture explained that the initial arrival period was the most difficult.

In addition to attempting to map the trajectory of adjustment, in most of the studies described above (Hirai, et al., 2015; Senyshyn, et al., 2000; Surdam & Collins, 1984) and in other studies (Bai, 2016; Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy, 2003), researchers have also explored which factors influence cultural adjustment. For instance, Surdam and Collins examined how several different variables affected adaptation. They found that international students who spent more time with American students were significantly better adjusted than those who spent more time with conational students. They also found that students from countries in the Western hemisphere adjusted to American culture more easily than students from the Eastern hemisphere. Other factors affecting adaptation included English language ability, parents' education level,

and perceived discrimination. Students whose language skills were better were also better adapted. Likewise, students whose parents were more highly education adapted to the culture better. Finally, students who perceived they were discriminated against had a more difficult time adjusting than did those who did not perceive any discrimination.

Senyshyn et al. (2000) looked at two of the same variables that Surdam and Collins (1984) measured—language ability and country of origin—and two other variables: gender and academic status (by which they meant year in school). They found that students with the lowest level of English ability (as measured by the TOEFL) were the least satisfied and least adjusted; however, students with the highest scores were not the most well-adjusted. Rather, students with high scores, but not the highest, were the best adjusted. These findings are contrary to Surdam and Collins' findings, which suggested that the higher the language ability the more well-adjusted the student will be. Senyshyn et al.'s survey results concerning country of origin do support Surdam and Collins' findings: Senyshyn et al. noted that students who come from Western Europe or Canada adjust to American culture more easily than students who come from Asia. Furthermore, their results supported the hypothesis that female international students have a more difficult time adjusting than male students. Concerning the fourth variable, academic status, Senyshyn et al. found that seniors scored higher on the survey—meaning they were more well-adjusted—than freshmen.

Additionally, Hirai et al. (2015) also measured factors that influence adjustment. Their survey included the Depression Anxiety Distress Scale (developed by Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), two sub-scales from the Psychological Well-Being Scale (developed by Ryff, 1989), most items on the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (developed by Ward & Kennedy, 1999), 26 items from the Big Five Inventory (developed by John & Srivastava, 1999), the Social Connectedness

in Mainstream Society Scale (developed by Yoon, Jung, Lee, & Felix-Mora, 2012), and the Ethnic Community Scale (developed by Yoon, et al., 2012). They concluded that students who perceived that they had more control over academic stress experienced fewer difficulties related to cultural adjustment than those who felt they had less control. Interestingly, academic stress itself was not a significant predictor of adjustment. Hirai et al. also found that students who were open to new experiences adjusted to the culture more easily than students who were not as open. Moreover, they found that connectedness to Americans affected adjustment; thus, Hirai et al. conclude that international students who have American friends adapt to the culture more easily and feel less distress than those who do not have friends who are Americans.

Yet another study in the area of international student adjustment is Tomich et al. (2003). These scholars conducted a study at a private university in the Southwest and compared Asian international graduate students and European international graduate students. Their instrument included the California Psychological Inventory (Gouph, 1987), the Inventory of Student Adjustment Strain (Crano & Crano, 1993), and the General Information Questionnaire, which was designed by the researchers themselves. Tomich et al. found that there was a significant difference between Asian students and European students, with Europeans feeling less strain. Based on this finding, they infer that the reason Asian students have more difficulty adjusting is because of the cultural differences between Asian culture and Western culture. Moreover, the results indicated that personality was a predictor of adaptation for the Asian students but not for the European students. Again, Tomich et al. infer that this difference between the groups is due to cultural differences. They explain that it is possible that American culture is so similar to European cultures that the personality of European students does not have an effect on how well they adapt. However, because Asian cultures are so different from the culture in America that

personality can have an effect. In other words, Asian students whose personalities are more open to change or more independent may have an easier time adjusting than Asian students whose personalities are less open and less independent. The results of this study are in agreement with both Surdam and Collins' (1984) and Senyshyn et al.'s (2000) assertion that which region of the world a student is from affects their cultural adaptation.

One researcher (Lin, 2012) suggests that cultural adaptation is easier when international students try to internalize American cultural norms. She states, "when international students adjust themselves by internalizing what they consider is American culture and blending it with their own schema, they can also shorten the transition period" (p. 341). Lin provides two contrasting examples to prove her point: one international student chose to "assimilate" and therefore had many American friends and felt comfortable living in America. Another student chose to avoid social events with local people and mostly spent time with people from his own culture. This student did not have any American friends.

Bai (2016) took a slightly different approach than the preceding studies. Rather than asking which factors influence adjustment, she measured acculturative stress levels of international students and examined which factors affect stress levels. Bai surveyed international students at a Midwestern university using the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students, which was developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), and several questions concerning perceived support. She found that while all the participants measured high on the stress scale, students from the Middle East had the highest levels of stress followed by Central and South American students. Bai also found only one significant predictor of acculturative stress: perceived support from school, which includes support from professors, staff, and classmates. The researcher did not find the age of the participants to be a significant predictor of

stress levels, nor did she find English proficiency to be a significant predictor. This last finding is contrary to what Surdam and Collins (1984) and Senyshyn et al. (2000) found, which was that language proficiency was a predictor of cultural adjustment. Bai (2016) explains, however, that several participants in her study dropped out because they were unable to complete the questionnaire due to their lack of English reading abilities. Therefore, the participants who completed the survey and whose results were analyzed all had a higher level of English reading comprehension.

Sense of Belonging

Related to acculturation and adjustment is the concept of sense of belonging. Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, and Cong (2015) conducted a qualitative study at two universities, one located in the Mid-Atlantic region and the other in the Midwest. After interviewing 40 participants, all of whom were international students, the authors concluded that faculty members play a major role in helping international students feel included. They also noted that many of the participants said that their professors gave them both academic advice as well as practical advice. In fact, many stated they received more help from professors than from American peers. Glass et al. (2015) emphasize how much of an influence faculty can have on international students and the part they play in contributing to students' sense of belonging.

Curtin, Stewart, and Ostrove (2013) explored how support from academic advisors contributes to a student's sense of belonging. They also compared international doctoral students' experience to American doctoral students' experience. In order to answer their research questions, Curtin and colleagues (2013) asked participants to complete an online survey. They found no significant difference between advisor support for international students and American students. There were also no significant differences in how they rated the importance of social

experiences: both groups rated social experience low. However, international doctoral students rated professional and research development experiences significantly higher than American students rated those experiences. Curtin et al. also found that international students had a higher sense of belonging than did American students. For both groups, the authors found that advisor support influenced sense of belonging.

Glass and Westmont (2013) also researched sense of belonging and compared international students and American students. The participants in this quantitative study included 415 international students and 816 American students at eight different universities in the United States. Rather than only examining which factors affected sense of belonging, Glass and Westmont also examined how sense of belonging affected academic success and cross-cultural interaction. They found for both American and international students that sense of belonging had a positive effect on academic success and cross-cultural interaction; however, the effect size was greater for international students, which means that sense of belonging plays a greater role in international students' academic success and cross-cultural interaction than it plays in the lives of American students. Glass and Westmont also found that discrimination had a negative effect on sense of belonging, and that involvement in co-curricular activities had a positive effect on sense of belonging.

Le, LaCost, and Wismer (2016) conducted a phenomenological study of female international graduate students at a university in the Midwest. All seven participants in this study noted how important support from their advisors and major professors was. This finding is congruent with the Curtin et al. (2013) study. Additionally, the participants mentioned how their support network, which included their advisors, gave them a sense of belonging. Most of them

also noted that their professors made an effort to include them in classroom discussions, which helped the participants adjust to the American classroom culture.

To summarize, in this section, I discussed studies concerning cultural adaptation. Several researchers (Hirai, et al., 2015; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Senyshyn, et al., 2000; Surdam & Collins, 1984) examined adjustment over time and attempted to chart international students' acculturation trajectories. Others (Bai, 2016; Tomich, et al., 2003) examined factors that affected cultural adaptation. The results from a few of the studies (Bai, 2016; Lin, 2012) indicate that a connection to Americans helps international students adjust to the culture in the United States. Moreover, researchers (Glass & Westmont, 2013) suggested that a sense of belonging contributes to academic success, and others (Curtin, et al., 2013) found that the students' support network affected their sense of belonging.

Friendship

Another theme that emerged from the existing literature is friendship. Pedersen (1991), Sovic (2009), and Yeh and Inose (2003) note that one of the reasons moving to and living in a foreign culture is so difficult is because students leave behind their social network and support in their home country. With the exception of Saudi Arabians, most international students come to America alone (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015); therefore they have to build new friendships after they arrive. They have the choice of making friends who are of the same nationality, are international but of a different nationality, or are host nationals. In several studies, researchers have specifically examined with whom international students tend to form friendships and why; and, in other studies, researchers have explored the benefits of international and American students establishing friendships with each other. These studies are discussed in this section.

Before discussing the literature on international students and friendship it is important to note what friendship is. However, as Vela-McConnell (2011) and Fehr (1996) explained there is no single, agreed upon definition of friendship. Allan (1989) pointed out that it is difficult to define friendship because it is “not just a categorical label” as it also “signifies something about the quality and character of the relationship involved” (p. 16). It is easier to define a person as a colleague, a boss, a cousin, or a spouse, for example, but the defining features of a friend are less clear (Allan, 1989; Fehr, 1996). In her book, Fehr (1996) reviewed several definitions of friendship given by social scientists and found a few commonalities amongst the definitions. Many of the definitions centered on friendship being a voluntary relationship between people who like each other and enjoy one another’s company. There were also mentions of trust and mutual respect among the definitions. In Vela-McConnell’s (2011) qualitative study on friendship in which he interviewed 80 people, he noted that when he asked participants what friendship meant to them, “there were as many answers as there were people interviewed” (p. 18). He did, however, find that there were themes among the definitions, which included intimacy, voluntary affiliation, camaraderie, shared values, and support (Vela-McConnell, 2011).

In the studies that follow the authors did not define the word friendship, perhaps because they assumed that their readers would know the definition or because of the lack of a common definition, as I explained in the paragraph above. The fact that there is not just one definition for friendship that social scientists have agreed on points to the importance of this present study in which I sought to learn how one group of people, Chinese international students, conceptualize friendship.

Friendship Patterns

In one quantitative study, Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) sought to build a functional model of friendship patterns by looking at who international students' friends were and what types of activities they did with those friends. The researchers found that the majority of the participants' best friends were conational students, and 17% of the participants had no American friends at all. Bochner et al. (1977) note that conational friendships are important for international students because they provide emotional support and allow people to perform their culture by cooking ethnic food or playing games and sports unique to their home culture. The authors also point out the importance of having host national friends: these friends can help international students navigate the new culture and improve their English speaking skills.

In a more recent study, Chavajay (2013) made similar findings and conclusions. Chavajay conducted a quantitative study at a university in the Northeast using the Index of Sojourner Social Support Scale, which was developed by Ong and Ward (2005). He found that international students tend to receive "socioemotional support" from other international students. This finding is in alignment with Bochner et al. (1977) who found that international students receive emotional support from conational students; however, Chavajay did not differentiate between multinational and conational friendships. Moreover, Chavajay found that international students receive some "instrumental support" from American students, meaning Americans help international students with questions about housing, transportation, or which courses to take, for instance. This finding is also congruent with Bochner et al. (1977) who noted that American friends provide assistance with navigating a new culture.

In another study, Brown (2009) took an ethnographic approach and found that international students formed conational friendship networks almost immediately after arrival in

the host country. There were two reasons students formed these friendships so quickly and easily. First, it was easier for international students to speak in their own language than communicate in English. Second, because they shared a common culture, interacting with conationals made living in America feel more like home. Participants in this study also stated that they were able to support one another. These findings are similar to a conclusion that Chavajay (2013) made: he suggested that the reasons international students rely more on other international students for emotional support is because of their shared cultural background as well as the shared experience of being international students. Similarly, Tsai and Wong (2012) found in their qualitative study of Chinese students' participation in organizations that the majority of students chose to become members of groups that were of the same or similar culture, religion, or language background. The participants built friendships through these organizations because of the shared cultural background.

Furthermore, Brown (2009) discovered that contact with American students was limited, and that South East Asian students in particular tended towards exclusivity. In addition, participants acknowledged that although they thought they should become friends with host nationals, they did not. In Sherry et al.'s (2010) study a participant mentioned that he did not know how to make friends with Americans. Similarly, Neri and Ville (2008) found, based on responses to a survey, that international students mostly formed friendships with conationals and that few became friends with American students or people in the local community. Additionally, Kusek (2015) conducted a case study in Ohio and discovered that international students tend to form relationships with people of similar backgrounds because "they find comfort through familiarity with people from their culture and background" (p. 122). Another qualitative study (Razek & Coyner, 2013), of which the focus was Saudi Arabian international students, revealed

that participants gravitated towards friendships with other Saudis and had few, if any, American friends. Also, Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) noted that 27% of the participants in their qualitative study were what they referred to as “self-segregators”, meaning they were exclusively friends with conational students. The self-segregators explained that they chose to be friends with conational students because they spoke the same language, ate the same food, and usually practiced the same religion. Surprisingly, Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) found that 35% of their participants did have American friends. All of the international students who had American friends spoke English fluently, and most had traveled before coming to the United States for school, which might explain the high percentage.

In a study that was just recently published (McFaul, 2016), the author created a diagram of international students’ friendship networks. In that study, 16 international students at DePaul University in Chicago were asked to fill out a questionnaire and tell where they met their friends. McFaul’s findings are in agreement with the previously mentioned literature in that the results indicate that international students have mostly conational friends. However, McFaul’s study was different from other studies detailed in this literature review because she asked participants where they met their friends. The results indicate that international students meet most of their friends through class, and that they meet all three types of friends—host-national, multi-national, and conational—in class. However, the majority of friendships were conational.

The research suggests that having a support system can be important when living in a foreign country. Several researchers, whose studies will be explained in more detail in the next section, have noted how difficult living in a new culture can be without a group of friends to support them (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Ramsay, et al., 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Due to the shared language, culture, and experience of being international students, it is not surprising

that international students tend to surround themselves with conational students. While the literature in this section was about with whom international students are friends and why, the next section specifically examines the benefits of having American friends while in the United States.

Benefits of Friendship

Perkins' (2004) qualitative study on cross-cultural relationships shows that internationals benefit from their American friendships: not only did Perkins' participants learn about American culture, they also received practical help such as proofreading of papers or rides to the grocery store. Additionally, there have been some studies in which researchers expand on how American friendships lead to cultural adjustment, including Kisang (2010), Li and Gasser (2005), Olaniran (1993), and Surdam and Collins (1984). In all of these studies, researchers state that having American friends leads to cultural adaptation, which also can help them become successful students. Kisang (2010) conducted a case study on the role of social networks at a university in the Southwest and noted that international students who lived with American students, whether by choice or because there were no conationals with whom to live, benefited from their roommate relationship because they had a chance to improve their English and learn about American culture. Also, Li and Gasser (2005) concluded, based on responses to a survey, that contact with people from the host country positively correlated to student adjustment. Additionally, Surdam and Collins (1984) conducted a quantitative study on the adaptation of international students at a university near the Rocky Mountains. The results of the study, which included a questionnaire, suggested that international students who spent their free time with Americans were significantly better adapted than those who spent more of their free time with conational students.

Furthermore, Olaniran (1993) compared close relationships with mere acquaintances and found that simply having American acquaintances can lower the cultural stress level of international students. Olaniran's study used a questionnaire that was adapted from the "Social Situation Questionnaire" (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). Whether it is a deep relationship or not, one thing is clear: knowing American students is important for cultural adaptation. None of the researchers, however, have examined how international students are building friendships with American students. If international students have difficulty participating in class and if they are not very confident of their ability to speak English, they may have trouble making friends with American classmates. The researchers looked at friendships that already existed, but did not research how the friendships developed in the first place. In order to better understand how American and international students build relationships with each other, further research needs to be done. Understanding how international students perceive friendship development could provide ideas for on campus organizational leaders to use to encourage interaction between the different cultures represented on their campuses.

Other researchers that have examined how having a support network of friends is beneficial include Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992), Ramsay et al. (2007), and Yeh and Inose (2003). Mallinckrodt and Leong conducted a quantitative study of international graduate students and social support. They note that having social support is important for all students, both American and international; they explain, however, that friends can help lower the stress of adjusting to a new culture, which is important for international students. In addition, the results from their study showed a high negative correlation between having social support and exhibiting symptoms of stress, meaning students with less support experienced more stress.

Furthermore, their results showed that male international students felt less connected to other students than did male American students.

Similarly, Ramsay, Jones, and Barker (2007) conducted a study on first-year university students' adjustment to college and found a correlation between well-adjusted international students and social support. Thus, international students with friends were more well-adjusted than students without friends. They also noted that more international students felt they lacked social companionship than American students felt that they did. Moreover, Yeh and Inose (2003) distributed a survey at a large urban university to learn the predictive factors of acculturative stress and noted that among international students, some felt more acculturative stress than others: students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America reported higher levels of stress than international students from European countries. In addition, similar to the Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) and Ramsay et al. (2007) studies, Yeh and Inose (2003) also found a correlation between social connectedness and stress: international students with friends were less likely to experience acculturative stress than those without friends.

In the aforementioned studies on friendships, researchers emphasize the importance of knowing American students in order to learn about the culture and adapt to a new country. However, there is some disagreement on whether social integration positively or negatively relates to academic performance. Stoyhoff (1997) conducted a multiple method study of first-year international students and examined the factors that influenced academic achievement. Stoyhoff (1997) concludes that having a support system is very important for academic success and that high achieving students look to their peers as well as instructors for assistance. In another study, Bista (2015) found a relationship between friendship and gains in learning. Bista surveyed Asian students at 25 universities in the United States using the *College Students*

Experiences Questionnaire, which was developed by C. Robert Pace in 1979 and later revised in 1998 (Bista, 2015). The results showed a positive correlation between relationships with peers and gains in learning; however, this survey did not distinguish between conational or American friends. As Bochner et al. (1977) and Razek and Coyner (2013) note, international students often build a support network with friends from their own culture as opposed to Americans.

Furthermore, in two quantitative studies, researchers showed a negative correlation between social integration and academic success but a positive correlation between academic integration and academic performance (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). Mamiseishvili (2012) identified the international students in the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study data set (BPS:04/06); the sample was 200 international students who enrolled in universities in fall 2003. From this sample, she found that social integration had a negative effect on persistence and found that academic integration had a positive effect. Similarly, Rienties et al. (2012) found that social integration had a negative effect on academic performance and found that academic integration affected performance positively. These findings were based on regression analysis of survey results. Therefore, according to Mamiseishvili (2012) and Rienties et al. (2012), understanding the academic culture in America is important, but being integrated socially actually hurts international students' performance and persistence.

On the contrary, Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) surveyed a Japanese cohort studying in America, and they found that the Japanese students who were more involved in extracurricular activities were also more involved academically. Furthermore, those who were more engaged reported being more satisfied with life in America in general (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). Sanford (2010) found, based on statistical analysis of a survey completed by international

graduate students at two universities in California, that community service is correlated to student success, and she suggests that one explanation for this correlation is that people participating in community service become friends with those they are serving alongside and those friends become their support system. Kim and Sedlacek (1995) actually say that while social integration is necessary for international students to fully enjoy their experience of studying overseas, it is not related to academic success. Kim and Sedlacek administered the Noncognitive Questionnaire, which was developed by Tracey and Sedlacek (1984), to international students at a university in the eastern region of the United States. They concluded that social integration and academic success are not correlated. The different findings among these articles might be explained by how the term “social integration” is defined and measured in different studies.

In Mamiseishvili’s (2012) study, for example, social integration was measured by participation in sports, school clubs, and fine arts events. Many of the participants reported that they did not participate in any of those activities; however, that does not mean that they were not socially integrated. International students might be integrated by participating in other activities that were not included in Mamiseishvili’s (2012) study, so one cannot say conclusively based on that study that social integration is negatively related to student persistence. Similarly, Rienties et al. (2012) also found that social integration is negatively related to academic performance. They explain this result by suggesting that students who spend too much time in social activities will have less time to devote to their academic studies (Rienties et al., 2012). This is, of course, true, but it is possible that students could be socially integrated to some degree without spending too much time participating in campus activities.

From the studies described in this section, it can be concluded that international students benefit from their friendships with American students. It was also noted that international students often struggle to make friends with Americans, and many tend to self-segregate. One researcher (McFaul, 2016) asked participants questions about where students met their friends, which provided information previous studies had not. However, none of these studies focused on how international students conceptualize friendship or how their friendships developed and were maintained.

Chinese and East Asian International Students

The final theme in the literature review deals with Chinese international students and other students of East Asian origin. Several researchers have focused specifically on Chinese international students. As is evident in the preceding sections of this literature review, most of the researchers examined international students as a group, and did not look at particular ethnic populations. Studies in which researchers examined Chinese international students in particular include Du and Wei (2015); Liao and Wei (2014); Lowinger, He, Lin, and Chang (2014); Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, and Chuang (2012); Wang, Heppner, Wan, and Zhu (2015); Wang, Wei, and Chen (2015); Valdez (2015); and Zhang and Goodson (2011). In three of these studies (Du & Wei, 2015; Wang, Heppner, et al., 2015; Wang, Wei, et al., 2015), the researchers demonstrated that being connected to the mainstream culture—i.e. American culture—helped Chinese international students in some way: Du and Wei (2015) surveyed Chinese students at a Midwestern university at two different points in time; once around the middle of the fall semester and a second time around the middle of the following spring semester. They concluded that students who were more acculturated—i.e. more connected to the mainstream culture—felt more satisfied with life than students who had higher levels of enculturation—i.e. students who

were more socially connected to Chinese culture and friends than to American culture and friends.

Similarly, Wang, Wei, and Chen (2015) also conducted a longitudinal study to learn how social factors are related to the cultural adjustment of Chinese international students. They found that social connectedness to the mainstream culture was statistically significantly predictive of satisfaction with life, but that social connectedness to Chinese culture was not significantly predictive. Wang, Wei, et al. conclude that Chinese students who have more interaction and more friendships with American students have higher levels of satisfaction and are better adjusted to American culture than Chinese students who are not as connected to the mainstream culture. In addition, Wang, Heppner, et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study of Chinese students throughout the United States. They found that Chinese students with stronger friendships with members of the mainstream culture had higher levels of cross cultural intelligence. Based on the Du and Wei (2015), Wang, Wei, and Chen (2015), and Wang, Heppner, et al. (2015) studies, it would seem that having American friends is beneficial for Chinese international students.

Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, and Chuang (2012) conducted a four wave longitudinal quantitative study on Chinese students and adjustment patterns. They found that Chinese international students tend to fall into four different categories, or four different trajectories, which they classified as consistently distressed, culture-shocked, relieved, and well-adjusted (See Figure 2.2). Because participants first took the survey before even arriving in the United States to attend university, Wang et al. (2012) were able to consider pre-existing characteristics, such as

self-esteem, maladaptive perfectionism², and problem-solving appraisal. Students who had high self-esteem, lower maladaptive perfectionism, and positive problem-solving appraisal adjusted to American culture more easily. The authors also noted that students in the well-adjusted group

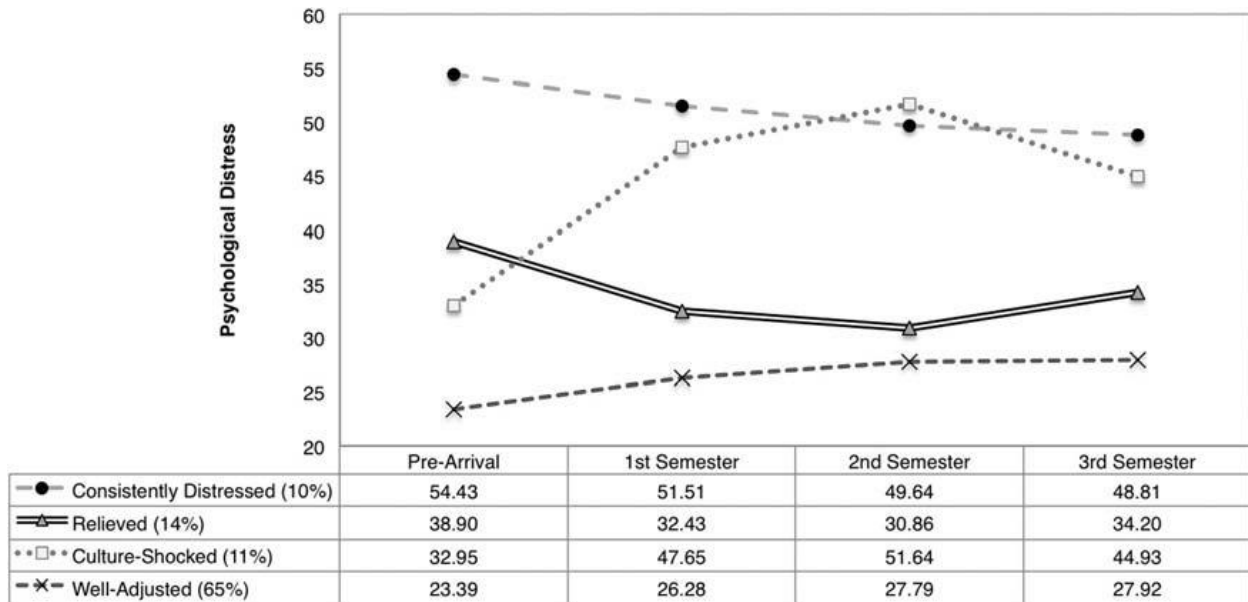


Figure 2.2. Characteristics of the four classes of psychological distress trajectories. (Wang, et al., 2012)

had a wider variety of people in their support network, meaning they did not solely rely on other Chinese students for support. The relieved group of students reported high levels of stress before coming to America, and then their stress levels decreased after arrival. The researchers speculate that this decrease in stress could possibly be contributed to two different explanations: perhaps the students had a source of stress in their home country, and once they moved away from that source, their stress lessened. Or, the students might have felt worried about moving to the United States, but then, after arriving, they realized it was not as bad as they expected, thus their stress decreased. The consistently distressed group tested high for stress levels at all four times. Wang et al. (2012) suggest that their distress was pre-existing and thus not a result of coming to

² Stoltz and Ashby (2007) describe maladaptive perfectionists as people who never feel that they are good enough. People who have maladaptive perfectionism are hard on themselves when they make mistakes.

America. They also note that the consistently distressed group had lower self-esteem, higher maladaptive perfectionism, and more negative problem-solving appraisal when compared to the well-adjusted group. Finally, the culture-shocked group had an increase in stress levels from Time 1 (pre-arrival) to Time 2 (first semester). When compared to the well-adjusted group, the culture-shocked group had a higher percentage of Chinese friends during the first semester. During the third semester, the fourth and final time the participants took the survey, the culture-shocked group's stress levels decreased, and their diversity of friends increased.

Lowinger, He, Lin, and Chang (2014) looked at how acculturative stress affects procrastination behavior in Chinese students. They surveyed 264 Chinese students at three different universities in the United States. The survey included items from the following scales: Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993), Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), and the Procrastination Assessment Scale – Students (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). In addition, the survey included four items which asked students to assess and report their English language ability on a Likert type scale. Lowinger et al. found which variables correlate with procrastination and noticed a few differences between the genders. For male Chinese students, the researchers found that homesickness and perceived discrimination were significantly correlated to procrastination. Thus, the more a male student felt homesick or felt discriminated against, the more likely he was to procrastinate on homework and assignments. For female Chinese students, they found that self-efficacy, language ability, and culture shock and stress significantly correlated to procrastination. Therefore, female students with high self-efficacy and high English language ability were less likely to procrastinate, and females experiencing high levels of culture shock were more likely to procrastinate.

Liao and Wei (2014) recruited Chinese participants for their study from four different universities, two in the Midwest, one on the East Coast, and one on the West Coast. They found that academic stress has an effect on positive affect, with higher stress levels associated with low positive affect. They also found contingency of self-worth on academic competence to be a moderator between academic stress and positive affect. This finding means that students with high contingency of self-worth on academic competence also experience low positive affect when academic stress is high. On the other hand, students with low contingency of self-worth on academic competence do not experience as low a positive affect when academic stress is high. Liao and Wei (2014) conclude that, “The [contingency of self-worth] domain examined in this study appears congruent with the Chinese culture’s emphasis on education and can perhaps be viewed as a culturally relevant moderator that influences Chinese students’ adaptation” (p. 112). This conclusion appears to support Wang et al.’s (2012) finding that self-esteem and maladaptive perfectionism were correlated to levels of stress and cultural adaptation.

Zhang and Goodson (2011) surveyed 508 Chinese students at four different universities in Texas. The survey included selected items from the following scales: Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000), Intergroup Contact Scale (Islam & Hewstone, 1993), Social Connectedness Scale—Revised (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001), Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977), and the Socialcultural Adaptation Scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Zhang and Goodson conclude that the more Chinese students adapt their behavior to match that of the host culture, the more they feel connected with Americans. Furthermore, the authors suggest that feeling socially connected may help alleviate emotional stress associated with being in a new culture. Zhang and Goodson also state that the results indicate that social connectedness to Americans might cause Chinese students to be less

likely to experience depression; however, Chinese students who withdraw from American students and reject Chinese culture are likely to experience higher levels of depression.

Another study that was specifically about Chinese international students was a qualitative study by Valdez (2015). Valdez examined Chinese students' classroom experiences in America. The participants in this study, who were all undergraduate Chinese students at a large university in the Southwest, expressed some difficulty adjusting to the culture of the American classroom. They especially found group work and discussion based classes to be different from what they had experienced in their home country. The participants also noted that they felt they lacked the common background knowledge that the American students seemed to share with one another. In addition, a theme that Valdez found in the interviews was that Chinese students tried to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes they thought Americans had about Chinese students; for example, the stereotype about Chinese students cheating or not speaking in class.

In addition to studies concerning Chinese international students, there have also been studies about Asian international students, which, of course, include Chinese students. In one study (Brown, 2009), which was mentioned earlier, the author found that students from South East Asia were more often self-segregators—people who exclusively had conational friends—than were students from other areas of the world. Likewise, Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011) surveyed international students at a university in Hawaii and found that Asian participants had significantly more conational friends than did non-Asian international students.

Furthermore, in a qualitative study on the social integration of international students (Sovic, 2009), the author found that many of the Asian participants expressed that they were shy and that made it difficult for them to initiate interaction with American students. Sovic (2009) notes that while most of the Asian interviewees considered themselves to be shy, the male Asian

students were especially timid. Although Sovic conducted her study in London, it still indicates that Asian international students often struggle with making friends while studying in a foreign country. This struggle could be a reality whether they are in England or the United States. Additionally, even if Asian international students have friends, they may have difficulty building strong, close relationships. As Bista (2015) concluded, Asian students' friendships were not as strong as friendships among non-Asian international students or among American students.

Asian Culture

One explanation for the difficulties Asian students often have when trying to make friends might be cultural differences. Bista (2015) claims that Asian international students have a more difficult time adjusting to American culture than do students from countries outside of Asia due to the cultural distance between Asian cultures and American culture. One of the major cultural differences is that people from East Asian cultures tend to be interdependent, while Americans tend to be independent (Cross, 1995; Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007). Hofstede (2001), Markus and Kitayama (1991), and Kitayama, et al. (2007) describe the independent mode of being as individualistic and self-centric. From this perspective, people are viewed as separate, autonomous agents. Additionally, people in independent cultures tend to be goal oriented, and their goals are based on their personal desires. This concept is contrasted with the interdependent mode of being, which focuses on the interaction and the relationships between people. Rather than focusing on personal goals, people in interdependent cultures tend to act in response to what is expected of them by their family and by society. Of course, not every Asian student is interdependent, but the predominant culture in Asian countries is interdependent, which can make adjustment to American culture difficult.

Another way that researchers (Hofstede, 2001; Ho & Chui, 1994) have categorized cultural differences is by describing them as individualistic or collectivist. Hofstede (2001) described collectivist cultures as societies that place an emphasis on the group rather than the individual. He also noted that in such societies it is believed that what is best for the group is also best for the individual. Hofstede (2001) claimed that China is a collectivist society based on the statistical analysis of data extracted from an existing database. The data were results from surveys taken by IBM and subsidiary company employees in 72 different countries in 1968 and 1972.

In 1994, Ho and Chiu conducted two studies on Chinese culture to determine whether people in China are collectivist. In the first study, Ho and Chiu (1994) analyzed Chinese proverbs and sayings and found that more proverbs mentioned collectivism as opposed to individualism, and that a greater proportion affirmed collectivism than affirmed individualism. For the second study (Ho & Chiu, 1994), the authors had participants, who were all university students in Hong Kong, rate their agreement on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree) with randomly selected sayings from the first study. In addition, participants were also surveyed using three other scales: the Individualism-Collectivism Scale, which was developed by Hui (1988), the Chinese Value Scale, which was developed by the Chinese Culture Connection (1987), and Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Chen, 1982). Ho and Chiu (1994) conclude that Chinese culture is more collectivist than individualist, but also acknowledge that both collectivist and individualistic values exist in Chinese culture. Ho and Chiu (1994) and Hofstede (2001) emphasize that the culture is predominantly collectivist, but warn not to stereotype every Chinese person as collectivist.

Cross (1995) distributed a survey at the University of Michigan amongst two groups of graduate students, East Asians and Americans, and compared the results. The results indicated that the East Asian students placed more importance on interdependency than did the American students. Cross also concluded that students who place more importance on interdependency have higher levels of stress when trying to adapt to a new culture. Furthermore, Cross suggests that students who are more independent tend to use better coping strategies. While Cross' findings do not prove that all Chinese international students are interdependent, it does imply that Chinese students may have a more difficult time adjusting to life in America than students who come from cultures that value independency more than interdependency.

Summary of Literature Review

This chapter has provided a review of the literature to establish a gap and to provide context for the study. As has been noted, international students encounter many difficulties when studying in a foreign country due to language and communication issues as well as cultural differences. In addition, while there have been studies in which the researchers demonstrated the importance of building friendships, international students often struggle making friends with American students. In many studies, researchers have examined who international students are friends with and the benefits of those friendships, but none have looked at the process—the actual experience—of becoming friends with American students. Furthermore, researcher which has focused specifically on Asian or Chinese international students suggests that that population may have even greater difficulty both making friends and adjusting to the American culture than students of other origins. This difficulty points to a need to further explore the Chinese international student experience, especially because there have been few studies on solely Chinese students as most researchers have either grouped all internationals together or grouped

all Asians together. Finally, the majority of the studies that have been conducted were quantitative and thus answered *what* questions. A qualitative study adds to the existing literature by asking different sorts of questions, such as questions beginning with *how*.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an explanation of the research approach and design as well as the data collection and analysis methods. It begins with an overview of my philosophical stance—constructivism—because the chosen approach and methods align with that paradigm. The chapter ends with a discussion on my research positionality.

Philosophical Paradigm

As a researcher, I operate within the constructivist paradigm. As such, I believe that reality is individually constructed. This belief is in opposition to a worldview such as positivism, which would state that what is real and true is objective and is imposed onto individuals. Instead, in constructivism, truth is constructed by people. As Maxwell (2013) explains, “Our understanding of this world is inevitably our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality, and no such construction can claim absolute truth” (p. 43). Thus, as a constructivist I recognize that people as individuals construct reality and that reality is neither objective nor absolute.

One methodological approach that aligns with this philosophical stance is constructivist grounded theory. This approach is inductive and seeks to build a theory from the ground up rather than by beginning a study with a theory. As a constructivist, I acknowledge that any theory I construct is an interpretation. Therefore the theory I construct as a result of this study will be an interpretation, and, as Charmaz (2014) states, “The theory *depends* on the researcher’s view” (p. 239). The theory will not be an absolute truth that applies to every Chinese international student

in the United States, but rather an interpretation of Chinese students' reality at a given moment in time and space.

Research Approach

For this present study, I used constructivist grounded theory. As the name suggests, I constructed a theory that is grounded in the data. In grounded theory, the researcher does not discover a theory, but rather the theory emerges from the data (Charmaz, 2014). For this study, when I use the word theory I am referring to what Charmaz calls interpretive theory, which concerns itself with the understanding of a phenomenon as opposed to explanation. Charmaz states, "This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual" (2006, pp. 126-127). This definition of theory is in contrast to the positivist view of theory, which would look for cause and effect relationships between concepts.

Because I used grounded theory, I did not begin the study with a theoretical framework. Instead, I collected and analyzed data and to see what themes would emerge. Rather than choosing a theory and then using that to shape or guide my study, I first began collecting data and then I began theorizing. As Charmaz (2006) says, "The acts involved in theorizing foster *seeing* possibilities, *establishing* connections, and *asking* questions. Grounded theory methods give you theoretical openings that avoid importing and imposing packaged images and automatic answers" (p. 135, emphasis in original). Thus, by using grounded theory I was not constrained by a pre-existing theory that could have limited my analysis. Instead, I allowed the theories to emerge from the data.

Design

This study was bounded to one university because the context—the location—was important to this study. By focusing the study on one university rather than many, participants were all students at the same place. They each had the same, or at least similar, opportunities to participate in on-campus events and interact with American students. Moreover, the number of international students at the university was important: if one participant was from an institution with very few international students and another was from an institution with a large percentage of international students, they would have different experiences. Instead, this study focused on just one university so that opportunities for interaction and the number of international students were the same for each participant.

Research Questions

Constructivist grounded theory is a flexible and iterative method, therefore the research questions changed during the study. The questions with which I started were as follows:

1. How do Chinese students form friendships with American students?
2. What are the challenges that Chinese students face when becoming friends with Americans?
3. How do Chinese students strive to overcome those challenges?
4. What are the facilitators that assist Chinese and American students in becoming friends?

As the study progressed, however, I had to change the questions based on the themes that were found in the data. I changed the first research question completely and eliminated the fourth question. The second and third question remained the same. The revised questions were

1. How do Chinese students conceptualize the phenomenon of friendship?

2. What are the challenges that Chinese students face when becoming friends with Americans?
3. How do Chinese students strive to overcome those challenges?

Site Selection

For this study, I used what Maxwell (2013) refers to as purposeful selection: the site and the participants were chosen purposefully because they would provide the necessary information to answer my research questions and goals. With that in mind, the site for this study was Higher Learning University, a large public institution located in Central City, which is in the Southeastern United States. HLU was a good case to study because the international student population has grown significantly over the last several years—104% from fall 2009 to fall 2014 (Office of International Services [OIS], 2015). Additionally, the number of international students at HLU is 1,817, which is greater than the number at any other university in the state in which HLU is located (IIE, 2015). These international students came from 77 different countries around the world, but nearly 70% of them are from Asia. The main country of origin is China, followed by Brazil and Saudi Arabia (see Table 3.1). Nearly 50% of international students are Chinese, while only 7% are Brazilian and 6% are Saudi Arabian (OIS, 2015). Of the Chinese student population, 61% are male and 39% are female (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2016).

Participants

The participants for this study were international students and visiting scholars who were from China and studying or conducting research at Higher Learning University. An international student is one who is classified as a non-immigrant and is on a student visa, such as an F-1 or J-1

Table 3.1

Top Ten Countries of Origin for Students at HLU

Country	Number of Students
China	884
Brazil	128
Saudi Arabia	116
South Korea	71
India	53
Japan	51
Colombia	38
Iran	25
United Kingdom	24
Turkey	22

Note. Adapted from OIS (2015).

visa. International visiting scholars also carry J-1 visas. Because this was a study of friendship formation between Chinese international students and Americans, it was important that all Chinese participants officially be classified as non-immigrant students or scholars. Immigrants would have possibly grown up in America or at least spent more time in America than international students, and as a result could already be more familiar with the culture. They could also likely have a support system of friends and family close by. International students, on the other hand, have come to the United States with the intention of only being here long enough to obtain a degree. They would most likely not have already lived in the U.S. for any amount of time, and thus would not be very familiar with the culture. Additionally, most of their friends and family would be in their home country, not the United States.

One of the ways I recruited Chinese participants was by using the snowball selection method: I asked my Chinese acquaintances to refer Chinese students who were interested in this study to me. Second, after obtaining permission from instructors, I also visited classes with large

international student populations (e.g. EN 120 and 121³) and asked for students to volunteer to be a part of the study. The majority of participants who volunteered to take part in the study were referred by another Chinese student.

In total, there were 33 participants. Eighteen participants were graduate students, 13 were undergraduates, and two were visiting scholars. Twenty-four participants identified as men and nine identified as women. The youngest participant was 18 and the oldest was 44. Of the participants who were formally interviewed, one had only been in the United States for two months and one had been in the States for 10 years (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3).

Data Collection

Data collection included formal interviews, informal interviews, a focus group interview, and observations. I discuss all of these in detail in this section.

Interviews

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese students' conceptualization of friendship as well as to understand the difficulties Chinese students face when trying to become friends with Americans and how they strive to overcome those challenges. In order to learn these things, I conducted 20 semi-structured, intensive interviews of international students and scholars at one university. Charmaz (2014) explains that this type of interviewing works well with grounded theory. Intensive interviewing is meant to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' own words and meanings. Its flexible nature also allows the researcher to pursue ideas as they come up in the interviews. Conducting intensive interviews is also congruent with the constructivist paradigm because it allows the researcher to question

³ EN 120 and EN 121 are first-year English composition classes at HLU and are made up entirely of international students. They are equivalent to EN 101 and 102, but are specifically for non-native speakers of English.

Table 3.2

The Formally Interviewed Participants

	Participant	Age	Gender	Status	Time in U.S.	Major
Formal, one-on-one interviews	Qiang	27	Male	Graduate student	3 years	Engineering
	Jun	31	Male	Graduate student	3 years	Educational psychology
	Jie	22	Male	Undergraduate	9 months	Civil engineering
	Tao	18	Male	Undergraduate	9 months	Undecided
	Lei	20	Male	Undergraduate	2 years	Finance
	Ying	28	Female	Graduate	4 years	Education administration
	Juan	32	Female	Graduate	4 months	Law
	Wei	29	Male	Graduate	6 years	Education (ESL)
	Ming	23	Male	Undergraduate	4 years	Finance
	Li	38	Female	Graduate	9 months	Electrical engineering
	Ping	30	Male	Graduate	1 year	Economics
	Wang	25	Male	Graduate	7 years	Engineering
	Zhang	38	Male	Visiting scholar	1 year	Computer science
	Jing	31	Female	Graduate	9 years	Marketing
	Yu	33	Male	Graduate	10 years	Applied statistics
	Yang	25	Female	Graduate	4 years	Business administration
	Zhao	28	Male	Graduate	4 years	Applied statistics
	Na	33	Female	Graduate	4 years	Education (ESL)
Liang	44	Male	Visiting scholar	2 months	Computer science	
Focus group interview	Chen	21	Male	Undergraduate	1 year	Computer science
	Xu	21	Male	Undergraduate	1 year	Finance
	Huang	20	Male	Undergraduate	1 year	Information sciences
	Zhu	21	Male	Undergraduate	1 year	Computer science
	Tang	21	Male	Undergraduate	1 year	Math

Table 3.3

Informally Interviewed Participants

Participant	Gender	Status	Time in U.S.
Yong	Male	Graduate	
Liu	Male	Graduate	5 years
Lin	Male	Graduate	
Wu	Male	Undergraduate	3 months
Yao	Male	Undergraduate	
Lu	Male	Undergraduate	1 year
Fang	Female	Graduate	2 months

participants about the meanings they associate with certain words; i.e. the meanings they have constructed. For example, because this is a study concerning friendship, I asked the participants what the word “friend” meant to them.

Each participant was interviewed one-on-one for approximately 60 minutes. Most of the interviews took place in either my office, when my officemates were not present, or in a study room at the library. One interview took place at the participant’s home, and the two interviews with visiting scholars took place in their respective offices. During the interviews, the questions were open-ended, and ideas were pursued as participants brought them up. Although I began with a list of questions to ask (see Appendix A for the interview protocol), I also asked additional questions during the interview as I thought of them. I recorded each interview using my iPhone and then uploaded the recordings to my laptop in order to transcribe them verbatim.

Additionally, after conducting and transcribing the first few interviews, I began to see some recurrent themes. Based on the themes, the interview protocol was adjusted. This iterative method is what Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as theoretical sampling. When using theoretical sampling, the data collection, coding, and analysis occur in conjunction. Thus, the codes and categories that emerged from one interview informed the next interview.

Focus Group

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, I also conducted a focus group interview (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). Five participants showed up for the interview, which took place in a private study room at one of the libraries on campus. Other people had been invited but did not show up. Two of the people I had invited were unavailable but scheduled one-on-one interviews with me later. The focus group interview was recorded on my iPhone and on a digital voice recorder, as a backup, and then transcribed after being uploaded to my laptop. I coded the transcription of the focus group interview in the same way that I coded the one-on-one interviews.

Observation

In addition to conducting interviews, I also observed an on-campus event that was developed for the purpose of encouraging intercultural interaction. International Coffee Hour meets most Fridays from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM throughout the fall and spring semesters. I attended the Coffee Hour five times and took jottings that were then written up as fieldnotes. I coded the fieldnotes in much the same way as the interview transcripts.

Informal interviews. When I attended International Coffee Hour, I also engaged in conversation with those in attendance. Although I did not read questions off of a protocol, I intentionally asked people questions about friendship. These conversations were essentially informal interviews. They were not recorded or transcribed verbatim, but I took notes and included those notes with the jottings of my observations.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I transcribed them verbatim and coded them. Both Charmaz (2014) and Saldaña (2013) state that initial and focused coding are appropriate for grounded theory.

During the first cycle of coding I used initial coding, meaning I read the transcripts and created codes that defined what I was reading (Charmaz, 2014). Saldaña (2013) explains that “initial coding is breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely explaining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (p. 100). Creating an initial code is taking a chunk of text in a transcript and explaining what it means with one word or a short phrase. Initial coding can also include process coding, in which gerunds are used to portray a sense of action, and in vivo coding, which uses verbatim phrasing from the transcript. Here (See Table 3.4) is an example of initial coding: this example was taken from a transcript of an interview. For the first

Table 3.4

Initial Codes

Transcript	Initial codes
<p>[IE: Why do you think you or other Chinese people sometimes have difficulty making American friends?] IE: I think it’s still language will be the primary reason for this friendship built on.</p>	Language difficulties
IE: The second I would say the culture difference.	Different cultures
IE: It’s because we grew up different or we educated different. I think it’s like how American define friendship and how we define friendship, uh, slightly different.	Different concept of friends

Note. IE = interviewee; IR = interviewer.

few interviews, I coded line by line, but then switched to incident by incident as recurring categories began to emerge. I used NVivo 11, which is a computer assisted data analysis software program, to keep the transcripts and codes organized.

During the second cycle of coding, I used focused coding, which is a way to categorize the initial codes. Charmaz (2014) notes that during focused coding, the researcher should look for patterns and also compare the codes to the data. During this cycle, initial codes were categorized into themes or categories. The focused codes in this study directly correspond to the subthemes that are explored in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. For example, one of the focused codes was “friendship maintenance through reciprocation,” and one of the subthemes underneath the overarching theme “Chinese conceptualization of friendship” is also “friendship maintenance through reciprocation.” In order to create focused codes, Charmaz (2014) suggests asking oneself, “In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?” (p. 140). Additionally, Charmaz (2014) asks, “Have you raised these codes to focused codes?” (p. 141). After I created initial codes, I looked for patterns, raised some codes to focused codes, and categorized the initial codes. Table 3.5 is an example of a focused code and the initial codes that I categorized under that focused code.

Table 3.5

Focused Code

Focused Code	Initial Codes
Friendship Maintenance through Reciprocation	Gift giving
	Helping each other
	Returning favors

If I had stopped analyzing after focused coding, I probably would have conducted a descriptive study rather than a theoretical one. Charmaz (2014) warns that many researchers claim to have conducted grounded theory, yet most of their studies are descriptive and not

theoretical. She explains that theorizing is analytic and abstract. In order to ensure that this present study was theoretical, I conducted a third cycle of coding, in which I used theoretical coding. The theoretical code is meant to be one which includes all the other codes. Saldaña (2013) uses the metaphor of an umbrella, explaining that the theoretical code “covers and accounts for all other codes and categories” (p. 233). Chamaz (2014) uses the metaphor of a human skeleton, saying that the theoretical code is the spine, and the other codes are the rest of the bones. In other words, the theoretical code is the core category, or backbone, that supports the rest of the codes and categories. This code should also be the main point or takeaway of the study. In this study, three themes emerged that work together to form the theoretical code. This can be visualized as one umbrella made from three materials sown together.

During the third cycle of coding, I realized that there were three themes that encompassed the focused codes, so I further categorized the focused codes. For example, I categorized the focused codes friendship maintenance through reciprocation, friendship development takes time, and group mentality under the theme Chinese conceptualization of friendship. The other two themes were challenges to becoming friends with Americans and efforts to overcome challenges. These three themes overlap and inform one another. By this I mean, the second theme, for example, not only consists of focused codes, it also relates to the first theme. Some of the challenges Chinese students face when becoming friends with American students (the second theme) is because of their conceptualization of friendship (the first theme). Moreover, the strategies Chinese students use to make friends (the third theme) are in response to the challenges (the second theme). In addition, the participants who employed these strategies (the third theme) realized that their conceptualization of friendship (the first theme) needed to be adjusted if they wanted to develop close friendships with Americans. Here are the three themes

and the focused codes categorized under the themes (see Table 3.6). I also elevated one theme, Chinese conceptualization of friendship, to theoretical code status.

Table 3.6

Themes and Focused Codes

Themes	Focused Codes
Chinese conceptualization of friendship	Friendship maintenance through reciprocation
	Friendship development takes time
	Group mentality
Challenges to becoming friends with Americans	Language and topics of conversation
	Cultural differences
	Chinese circle
	Lack of Americans at events
Efforts to overcome challenges	Put themselves out there
	Distance themselves from other Chinese
	Going to church

Furthermore, in addition to coding the interview transcripts, I also coded my fieldnotes using initial and focused coding. The fieldnotes and resulting codes presented the opportunity to triangulate my data. Consequently, throughout the entire data analysis I used the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Using this method, data are compared at every level. Thus, within each interview statements and incidents were compared, and what was said in one interview was compared to what other participants said in other interviews. Likewise, observations on one day were compared to observations another day, and those were also compared to the interview data.

Memo Writing

Memo writing is an important part of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). By writing memos, also known as analytic notes, throughout the data collection and analysis stages, I started to analyze the themes and codes. As Charmaz explains, “Memo-writing creates an interactive space for conversing with yourself about your data, codes, ideas, and hunches. Questions arise. New ideas occur to you during the act of writing” (p. 162). Through memo writing I was able to explore ideas as well as analyze the data. When data collection and coding were complete, I referred back to my memos to assist me in writing my findings and conclusions. The memos also serve as a record of my thought process and methodological choices throughout the data collection and analysis stages.

Ethical Considerations

I was granted Institutional Review Board approval before beginning interviews and observations (see Appendix C for the IRB letter). I also gained informed consent from the participants. The participants were told that this was a study on friendship and were also allowed to skip any question that they felt made them uncomfortable. The one-on-one interviews and the focus group interview were recorded on a digital recording device and then transferred to my personal laptop for transcribing. For privacy purposes, I was the only person with access to the interview recordings and the transcriptions. While portions of the transcripts are quoted in this dissertation, the names of all people and places have been changed in order to protect confidentiality. The audio files and transcriptions will be deleted upon completion of this study.

Additionally, I used member checking, which Marshall and Rossman (2016) say is “a way to ask participants whether [the researcher] ‘got it right’” (p. 230). Charmaz (2014) recommends using member checking when conducting grounded theory. I emailed each

participant the transcript of their interview and provided them with the opportunity to add to, clarify, or retract anything they had said. Six participants responded that they had nothing else to add. One participant clarified that a negative statement he made during the interview about one American was not reflective of his opinion of Americans in general. The rest of the participants did not respond to the email.

Quality Assurance

The main benefit of using constructivist grounded theory for this study is that I was not constrained by pre-existing theories. When approaching a study with a theory already in mind, the researcher might miss some of the themes in the data. Constructivist grounded theory, however, allows the themes to emerge from the data. In order to establish the trustworthiness of my findings, I triangulated the data by using multiple data collection methods: one-on-one interviews, focus group interview, informal interviews, and observations. Furthermore, I created an audit trail by keeping meticulous notes on the entire research process.

Positionality Statement

My life experiences have led me to be interested in this topic and are part of my positionality. I spent much of my childhood and early adulthood overseas, so I know what it is like to be a foreigner and to be far away from family and friends. I have experienced culture shock and know the frustrations of learning another language. I also visited China on several occasions as a child, so I have some familiarity with Chinese culture. My experience put me in a position to understand what my Chinese participants were feeling and dealing with. This was important when I interviewed students because they might have been more willing to open up and share honestly with someone who has had similar experiences. I was careful, however, to continually be reflexive and not impose my experiences onto my participants. I listened to them

and realized that although we might have had similar experiences, they were not exactly the same and our interpretations of the experiences were different.

Additionally, my work experience is part of my positionality. As an English as a second language instructor, I have met and interacted with hundreds of international students at Higher Learning University and elsewhere. I have experience talking with and listening to students with various levels of English skill and a variety of accents, which was beneficial during interviews. I thought that a possible limitation might have arisen if the participants knew that I was a teacher and thus distance themselves from me. If the participants thought of themselves as students and me as a teacher, they might think there should be a hierarchical difference between us. At the start of each interview I emphasized that I was conducting this study as a student with the hopes that they would be more willing to share their feelings and frustrations with another student. I did not mention having been a teacher to most of the participants. The one exception was during one interview when the participant apologized for not speaking English well, and I told him that I was accustomed to listening to non-native English speakers because I used to teach English as a second language.

Summary of Methodology

In Chapter III, I presented my methodology and methods. I conducted a constructive grounded theory study of Chinese international students and their conceptualization of friendship. In this chapter I first situated the study within my philosophical framework, constructivism. I then explained my research approach and design as well as the site for the study. This was followed by a description of my methods. In the next chapter I present the results, which I have organized according to three overarching themes.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter I present the results of this study. I organized the results into three themes that emerged during the data analysis. These three overarching themes are 1) Chinese conceptualization of friendship, 2) challenges to becoming friends with Americans, and 3) efforts to overcome challenges. Within each theme the results are further divided into subthemes.

Summary of Methods

This constructivist grounded theory study began in April 2016 at Higher Learning University in Central City. A total of 33 participants were interviewed. I conducted 20 semi-structured, in-depth interviews, eight informal interviews at Coffee Hour, and one focus group interview with five participants. I also attended Coffee Hour five times and took jottings which I later wrote up as fieldnotes. I conducted three cycles of coding: initial, focused, and theoretical. What follows in this chapter are the findings from the interviews and observations. It should be noted that the participants came from various cities and regions of China, and, at the time of the study, were all at the same university in the southeastern region of the United States. Had the participants all been from one city in China, or had they been studying in a different region of the United States, the findings from this study may have been different. As such, this study is specifically about how this particular group of 33 Chinese participants at one particular university conceptualizes friendship at a particular point in time.

Chinese Conceptualization of Friendship

The first theme was Chinese conceptualization of friendship. A few participants directly stated that they believed the idea of what a friend is and what friendship means differs for Chinese and American students. Within this theme there are three subthemes that describe the Chinese conceptualization of friendship. These subthemes are friendship development takes time, friendship maintenance through reciprocity, and group mentality. All three of these subthemes also directly correspond to focused codes from the data analysis.

Friendship Development Takes Time

A few participants mentioned that it takes a long time to establish a friendship and that two people cannot act like friends, meaning they cannot be friendly to one another or share details about their lives or their opinions, until a significant amount of time has passed. The participants contrasted this with how they perceive Americans to make friends. They noticed that Americans might meet by happenstance in class or at an on-campus event and immediately start talking and make plans to hang out in the future. Lei, an undergraduate finance major said,

I will say Chinese need more time or experience to make friends. And American, in my experience, just chance. If you have chance to talk with them, or you can meet them somewhere, some activities, you can make the friends.

Lei gave an example from his experience in the United States. He told me about a time he met some Americans for the first time at a Bible study and they spoke for a few hours. He explained that this would not have happened in China.

And uh in the United States, in the meeting it just like I introduced the Bible study night. Even though they are some people I've never met, we could still sit together and talking with the whole night. Like two hours or three hours. I think that's one difference. When we, most of the Chinese when they met strangers, they would not be active to talk to the strangers. And they of course cannot sit with them in the whole night.

Likewise, Jing stated, “Here is easy, but relatively easier. But in China I think it really take a lot of time.” She also elaborated on that:

And here, I mean, making friends is more easy. It’s easier, like when you go to a bar probably you just see someone and you start talking to them. Or sometimes if I’m waiting in line like shopping, or I’m waiting in a doctor’s office or something and someone stopped to talk to me, they’re probably, you know, suddenly I’m making friends. And we exchange our names and phone numbers and everything. So I think here is more like casual, but there, in China, it’s like you build on the relationship. You have to have something, like, is, for example, you go to class together, or you attend an event together, or you knew a mutual friend, or you have, like, you know, some sort of relationship. But here it’s more like casual.

Other participants said something similar. Na said, “For me, I experience the biggest difference is in China maybe it will take a longer time for you to build friendship with each other.” Li, a PhD student in electrical engineering, said,

It takes time. Sometimes I just ask myself why I haven’t good, very close friend here. And I have to recall my previous friend. And I believe we built up that friendship using a long time. Maybe one year to trust him or her. So I told myself it’s just a problem of time.

Although the participants explained that it takes them a long time to develop friendships, they also said that once a friendship is established, it is a strong relationship. Na said, “In China although it takes a longer time to build friendship, but as soon as you build it, it is very hard to break it. So the friendship maybe last for a long period.” Likewise, Yu explained, “I think Chinese people don’t trust strangers easily. But once they make good relationships they tend to you know hang out together more often.”

Several participants mentioned that in China strangers would never greet each other, but they had noticed that at Higher Learning University and the surrounding area, Americans smile and say hi to strangers. For instance, Ying said, “Like, I think, Chinese culture is more shy or subtle. Like, you don’t see Chinese people to say hi to each other like strangers on the street or

like that.” She also said, “It confuses me at the very beginning. Like, strangers said hi to me. Really like, ‘Hey! How are you doing? Whatever.’ Like that. I thought, ‘What’s that all about?’ Likewise, Yu said, “They not like easily to say hi or smile to strangers. You know. In the street in China if you smile at a stranger, they will think you are crazy or something.” Also, Ping stated, “In China you run into some strangers, they may not be very friendly, may not be very nice to you.” All of the members of the focus group also said that they would never greet a stranger in China.

In addition, the participants said that Chinese people tend to have fewer friends than Americans do, but that those relationships also tend to be more intimate than Americans’ friendships. Fang, a new PhD student that I spoke to at Coffee Hour said that she has a small number of closely knit friends. Likewise, Lei, an undergraduate finance major, said that he thinks Americans use the term “friend” more loosely than Chinese people. By this he meant that Americans might have a great number of friends, many of which are not deep relationships, but Chinese people only use the word friend to describe their closest relationships. Lei said,

I mean, the friend, the word friend in American is not that hardly. You know what I mean? [Amanda: Like we have lots of friends?] Yeah, yeah. Everything can be friends. But in China we do usually mention friends as an important word. It means sometimes responsibility.

Friendship Maintenance through Reciprocity

The second subtheme was friendship maintenance through reciprocity. Several participants spoke about the importance of gift giving, helping each other, and returning favors as important aspects of developing and maintaining friendship. For example, Ying, a 28-year-old PhD student said, “You have to give gifts to maintain friendship.” Similarly, Jing, a 31-year-old master’s student said, “You know, also we exchange gifts, like during most important occasions, so that’s close friend.” She went on to explain the importance of gift giving further:

For example, if I know you for two years, I know it's your birthday, I'm going to give you a surprise, and probably I will choose a gift like \$50 or something. And then I expect you to give me something worth at least \$50, give back to me when I'm having a birthday. And if you forgot my birthday, and I will probably think, probably our friendship is going, not going to be as good as it used to be. Does that make sense? And after, you know, probably I know you for ten years, I will expect, you know, we exchange gifts more than \$50. Does that make sense? So it's more like, we value someone, or we value the relationship probably we are going to give more money and energy.

Other participants said something similar, including Wang, a 25-year-old master's student:

In China, everybody gets gifts... Like the birthday thing would be a perfect example for you to see how it goes... Like if you have a birthday, your birthday I buy this water bottle to you. Next time, it's my birthday, everybody has a birthday, maybe you give a phone to me. So basically I use my own money to buy a gift. Usually we will match. So it depends on who has a birthday first. So if I get a birthday present, an iPhone 6. So I'm going to give a gift usually not, it should be at least the same or better than that. And next time you will return another better gift for me. So this thing is like you crawl up to the stairs... So that's why I feel sometime is difficult to make friends with Chinese students. It's built up about this thing like you need to do better for your friend. ... Or we have our expectation about other people can do. Maybe sometime I will expect to get iPhone but I get a bottle of water. So I am thinking, what is wrong with our relationship, our friendship? Did I do something wrong? Next time I have two choices. Either give you something like a bottle of water, or I give you a nice gift to see how it leads for the next time. You know? So that's. I don't think American has this kind of thing or similar.

A few participants mentioned being offended by gifts Americans had given them. For example, Na was shocked that Americans will give gift cards, wine, or flowers, things she considered to be impersonal. She contrasted this with gift giving in Chinese culture: "In China it will take you longer time to think about what to send as a gift. Choosing gift is also an art in China." In addition, Wang told a story of one of his Chinese friends feeling insulted when her American friend gave her a bumper sticker for her birthday. He said, "But you know what he give to her? A car sticker that said, 'I love Chingdao.' Her city. Yes. So she feel so mad about it. But, uh, that kind of an idea of how things goes."

Helping was another thing that almost all of the participants mentioned. Jie, a 22-year-old undergrad, said, "And [my friend] give me lots of help, I give him lots of help." Qiang, a 27-

year-old PhD student, said that a friend “may help you when you need. Hopefully. Like family. I think that’s a friend.” Likewise, Yu said, “They are helpful. Offer help to others.” Jing also explained that “Chinese people are more helpful with their friends.” She went on to say, “But you know for Chinese people it’s more like, hey, we’re friends. It’s your obligation. It’s kind of part of the friendship pact. You have to help me, right?” Na, a doctoral student, noted, “When you have trouble, when you need help, and they are the person you can first think. You can ask help from. And usually they can help you and give you some guidance, advice, or something else.”

Some participants gave specific examples of how their American friends have helped them since they have been living in the United States. Wei, a PhD candidate, said his closest American friend gave him a ride to the hospital once and has also driven him to the airport. He explained that because the American helped him, Wei knew that they were friends: “And so yeah, that’s, and he’s a person I consider to be like close friends.” A few participants mentioned Americans helping them learn how to drive or shop for a vehicle. Others mentioned receiving help with proofreading papers or advice about the culture.

Related to the idea of helping was the concept that when a person is helped by a friend, he or she should return the favor. Yang, an MBA student, explained it this way: “I think it’s very common that I was taught, like when I was a little girl, so if someone do you a favor, trying to pay back in certain ways. Not necessarily in the same way, but try to be as helpful as you can.” She went on to say that “that’s like an important component” to friendship. Jing explained it like this:

But for the Chinese people, it’s our um gratitude for you helping us. Helping is not a one way traffic. It’s two way. You help me, I give you something. So that’s how Chinese people always maintain friendship with each other. It’s like the unspoken word of the friendship. You know?

Likewise, Wang said, “I help you to do this I expect next time if I have a favor you need to help me.” He also gave an example of this from his life: an American helped him find a car to purchase and then later Wang returned the favor. He said,

Not to return this specific behavior, but the car thing has been done. And later on he has something. His yard needs to put some more grass. Like the grass chunks. And he’s kind of aged, so he couldn’t finish all the work himself. So me and my other friend go to his house and help him to finish the, you know, put the grass block on the. To do the grass. You know what I mean, right? ... Yeah, we helped them to put those on his yard. Lots of things like this.

Another participant, Yu, also emphasized helping and returning favors. He stated,

Within your friendship or friends, that small circle, the small society. They expect you to do more. And also you are expected to do more for them, like, you know, you do some favor to them and they will return the favor.

Group Mentality

The participants explained that among friends there should be a focus on the group rather than the individual. Jie talked about how he views his friendships: “We in the same situation. And you will close to each other. We call that sitting in one boat...If you fall, you fall together. If you smoothly, you be smoothly together.” During the focus group interview, Chen and Tang contrasted Chinese and American culture and explained,

Tang: Yeah, also, I think most of Americans more emphasize on their rights, which is another reason for me, I don’t to talk with some Americans. Yeah.

Chen: I think in China, focus on group.

Tang: Yeah, focus on group.

Chen: More than individual.

Because of the group mentality Chinese friends are closely involved in each other’s lives. Wei told me a story of an interaction with two of his closest American friends to explain one of the biggest differences between the Chinese and American view of friendship.

For example, the other day I asked my American friends if I can run on the street, like the road you just drove on to get here. And they told me that I can, but they won’t do it. And I was like, and that, that’s a pretty liberal approach to me. Like, you have the freedom to

run, but then you run at your own risk. I have, I am not involved in this, I have nothing to do with this. But for me, I wouldn't do it. And in my mind, friends, as friends, or close friends, you should tell your friends that you should not do it. You should not. You need to give some suggestions or advice about that, instead of saying you can run.

Wei also told a story about his two American roommates going out of town for a few nights without telling him. His expectation was that because they were friends, they should have told him where they were going and when they would be back. Wei said,

And then my friends left the house last Saturday. They didn't tell me where they were going. So the first night it was OK. And then the second day I was like, where did they go?...And then one of them called me yesterday. He told me that they went to Hoover and they will stay there for some time. They might get back today or tomorrow. So that's something like I found it difficult to deal with. Without being told earlier when they were going. But in general I think it is this very, very democratic, very liberal way of dealing with things that kind of makes me. I can't get used to that.

Wang had some similar things to say. He explained his understanding of American friendship like this:

I think it's like how American different friendship and how we different friendship. Uh, slightly different....If I am a friend with you so I won't go too much to your side. And I don't want you to bother me too much of this side. So that's why I understand about Americans and friendship. So we are friends, we can care about each other, but I don't want to bother you too much about your personal stuff or something.

When I asked him to clarify what he meant, Wang said, “[Americans] don't want to get involved in your life too much....[Chinese] will get involved in others' lives.” He then went on to give several examples of personal questions Chinese people ask one another that, in his experience, tend to make Americans uncomfortable, such as questions about a person's income or intimate details about a woman's pregnancy.

Similarly, Liang explained that Chinese and Americans have a different view of privacy. He said,

And I tell you the truth, I think the really difference is that privacy. The concept of privacy. Because I talk to Americans, and I talk to Chinese. And I compare our conversations, I can see that the culture is difference. The most difference is privacy. For

example, some topics in China, the Chinese people talk, family, income, marital status. That Americans feel annoyed. They don't share the same concept of privacy.

In addition, the group mentality can be seen in the way Chinese people eat and pay for dinner at a restaurant. Lei said that when Chinese friends eat together, they tend to share their food with each other, but that Americans tend to only eat the food on their own plate. He said,

So you know, especially when we eat with friends, we will just like for example take the food from his dishes and just eat them. So we don't do the separate thing. But American, they usually do the separate thing. They will just eat alone and talking. That's the difference, different.

Jun also noted, "So like when we go to the restaurant we probably to order different entrees but put them together so we can sharing all dishes."

Moreover, Yu explained that when Chinese people eat out, rather than splitting the bill, one person will usually pay. Yu said,

It's like when you go out to eat it's very rare to see, to, you know, split the bill. Usually just one or two, usually one, pay all the bills. When you hang out and go to the restaurant. And that's the culture thing. That way people think like, "OK. He paid this time for all of us. But next time, maybe me, I pay for all of us." This way we don't really, we are not strangers. We are bound together. It's like yeah, family thing.

Likewise, Huang said, "When we are in China, we are hanging out friends. I mean, always one of us to pay all of the bill, not separate. But American students always separate for each person pay the bill."

Challenges to Becoming Friends with Americans

Several participants said that it was difficult to make friends with Americans. Yang said, "I feel like it's hard for me to get more involved with my Americans friends, or just my American classmates in general." Likewise, Chen noted, "I can make friends easier with, with international students than American." "It's very difficult to makes friends," said Liu, during an informal interview.

The participants who had difficulty making friends explained why they thought that was. If they did not think they had difficulty, they explained why they thought other Chinese students might have difficulty making friends with Americans. Some of the explanations depended on the students' major and gender. For example, Wei speculated that he had trouble making friends with his classmates because he was an education major and most of his classmates are women. He said, "I'm not sure if it has something to do with my gender. I'm a male international student. And also since I'm in the College of Education, and there are more female students in the College." Later in the interview he said, "But I think my gender plays a role in it. They consider me as a male Chinese. And then, they don't probably want to establish that friendship." Li had a similar problem as a female student in a male dominated field: "And women are very rare. Not so many women. Uh, maybe that is one of the reasons." Li also noted that there were few Americans in her classes, so she did not have many opportunities to meet Americans through class. She said, "Actually electrical engineering for graduate students, uh, American students are very rare. Most are Chinese and Indians."

Language and Topics of Conversation

Most participants mentioned the fact that English was not their first language as a reason making friends with Americans could be difficult. Tao said, "Sometimes we not very good at English. We have some trouble to communicate." Jun also said, "The most different, difficult stuff is like the language." Likewise, Min said,

If you come here not for long time, your English is not good. So sometimes, I think usually you can't understand what the American students speak. So like the, if I stay with my American friends and I usually can't understand, I think my listening is not good.

And Zhao said, "For the majority of the Chinese students here, the biggest obstacle is the language." Na elaborated on the language issue by explaining that specifically it was jargon and

idioms, things Chinese people were not taught in their language classes, that made communication difficult. She said,

The problem is you can't understand some idioms, jargon, slang, so this the point... Colloquial words, idioms, or slang. But we can't understand... Yeah, and also, and also another problem is this kind of, can we say it is buzzy word or something? These kinds of words change very quickly.

Moreover, a few participants mentioned being nervous about trying to speak with Americans. Ming said,

Because the language is a big problem, and one of the big problem is maybe someone is really hard to, is afraid to talks. Why? Because they are afraid about if someone talk they don't understand. Afraid is not good, so.

Likewise, Zhao explained,

They will not speak as much as they want. Because they know they feel nervous, intense and they probably make other people laughing. You know, it hurts the will to speak. I think, yeah. The situation is not so complex. I think for the majority of the Chinese students the language is the biggest and probably the most important issue.

Wei gave an example to explain that when he tried to speak and was corrected it discouraged him from speaking to Americans in the future. Here is a portion of a story Wei told about a hiking trip he took with a group of Americans:

Then I can see at one point whenever I try to say something to one of the leaders of the group, and if she try to say something, then she would try to say something about my language. And then that kind of shut me down a little bit. And then she gets to talk about things. So, this kind of action or behavior is something I experienced in the past. And that could be something that prevents me from making friends with Americans... If I had a lot of those experiences then kind of creates that block for me to try to make an effort to making friends with Americans. So over time it can, yeah, create some trouble.

However, sometimes it was not the language that made it difficult to make friends, but the topic of conversation. Several participants noted that often they did not understand what Americans were talking about because they did not share the same background knowledge. For example, Juan said, "But one important thing because we live in a different environment, the

popular topic about the social like the pop star or some something or some political leaders, we Chinese cannot know very deep.” And Na said, “For me, sometimes it is difficult that you cannot find the common topic to talk with each other. You can talk about sports. For instance, if you talk about spots, but Chinese people don’t know the rules.” Chen said, “And we don’t have the same topic to talk about. Uh, when I see American as my classmates, I don’t know how to say the first sentence to them. Yeah. And they talk about something I don’t understand.” And Jun said, “So once you talking some celebrities, like talking some gossips, even sometimes talking about some politics, I basically knew nothing about that. Yeah, so it’s really hard for me to like get in some topic to talk.”

Additionally, several participants mentioned begin afraid they would offend Americans. Tang said, “It seems like you are rude to talk. Yeah, I also feel this way. I’m really afraid of saying something that say it’s rude for him. Yeah, so this is why sometimes I don’t want to talk to them.” He also said, “Sometimes like, I really, I really concentrate about what I need to talk because if I talk with something wrong to Americans, I always feel some uncomfortable.”

Similarly, Zhao said,

as a foreigner here at most times I don’t know what other people are thinking about. So it is really nervous for me to make the first step because I am really nervous there are conflicts between me and the others.

And Yu said, “Sometimes you might, um, have concerns about what you can talk about or what you cannot.”

Na said that she personally had not experienced accidentally offending an American, but she told a story of one of her Chinese friends unintentionally hurting an American woman’s feelings.

So in China, in Chinese, we say the words “old”. It is a kind of respect words. . . .But here in the United States, old is not a respect word. . . .So the teacher invited the students to go

to their home to have a party, a dinner, something else. And then the wife of the teacher stand on the chair to decorate the room. I don't remember it is Thanksgiving or Christmas, but it is a holiday. And when this guy came in, he saw the wife is decorating the room. And his first response is "Let me do it. You are old." And then the wife feels very unhappy. So it is kind of example of the language.

While most participants mentioned having language or communication issues, Qiang said that being a non-native English speaker did not prevent him from talking to Americans or making friends. He said, "I think I can explain most thoughts to them in English. So I'm not unmotivated or encouraged to only talk in Chinese. Yeah, because I have I don't feel have a lot of language issues." Later in the interview he spoke about talking with his friend and lab mate:

Yeah, well, I mean, I don't think it's a big deal. Even though maybe I can't, sometimes I can't explain all of my thoughts to American friends here. Like there's another grad student... Actually he's another PhD student in my lab. His name is Isaac. I found sometimes I am a foreigner, so it's foreign language, and I can't always explain all the thoughts to, I mean, clearly. But I think it's not a big deal, because you can use body language or even draw something. So you can explain it. Use the words you know. So I found it's not a big thing only to explain it very, very accurately. So I don't think it's a big deal. Language is won't be a big deal.

Cultural Differences

Several participants noted that cultural differences were also a barrier to making friends with Americans. For example, Na said,

So the main problem for me probably is the culture. So totally different culture between the Western and the Eastern. And the culture is a kind of decisive factor for many subcategories. For example, the culture is influential in people's personalities.

Zhao also connected cultural differences with difficulty becoming friends. He said, "Maybe they have a very different understanding of being friends. Culture thing."

Friendly but not friends. Earlier in this chapter I wrote that several participants explained that in China strangers do not greet one another and that people do not act friendly unless a relationship has already been established. They also contrasted the way Chinese people act with how Americans behave. I write about the Chinese perception of Americans' behavior in

this section because the participants specifically stated that Americans' behavior was a challenge to developing friendship.

Several participants shared similar experiences with meeting Americans. They told stories about meeting an American, thinking they were friends, but then later discovering that they were not friends. For example, Ming shared that he met a guy in class and thought that they were becoming friends. He said,

I think in the last year I have a group project, and one guy, he is really kind. And he is really hard to study. So, he helped us a lot. So we have each other's like some, we just have the message and connect to each other. And one day, I said, I mean after the presentation he said he had a party, so I told, "Can I join?" He said, sure, yes. But after that maybe he forget. But so. So, it, I mean, it just ended here.

He went on to explain his confusion over how the American acted: "So, sometimes I don't understand. I mean, do they really friendly or not? This is one of the kind of things I worry about." Ming went on to say that when Americans acted friendly but were not really his friends, he felt like they were lying to him. He said, "So we maybe trust somebody first time, but if they lie to us. Maybe they don't want to lie. They just want to be friendly and let another people feel more comfortable."

During the focus group interview, the participants also mentioned similar experiences. Tang gave two examples. Two different times he met an American, that person said they should hang out, but then they never did. He said, "Well, this summer I met a girl who is from a sorority. You know what I mean? So always say, 'We need to hang out.' Kind of like, but never." Zhu also had a story of meeting someone and thinking he was a potential friend, but then the American forgot who he was. Zhu said,

I usually go to International Coffee Hour. And like once I went to International Coffee Hour and I talk with a boy. And we have a lot of fun. But the next week I went again and he just said, "Hi, how are you? What's your name?" "Excuse me!?" And like this.

Wei also shared a story. He talked about having a few people over for dinner and then never hearing from them again. Here is part of that story:

And then at that night, at that particular night then you guys have a lot of fun, and, you know, things went very well. But then weeks later, two or three months later then nothing is going to influence that. So it's hard to, yeah.... You cook Chinese dish and had lot of fun at one particular night. But then a couple weeks later, you don't recognize each other or anything like that.

Na described it like this, "Some people you meet every day and you say, 'Hello! How are you doing?' So it seems that you are very intimate, but actually when you are in trouble, maybe not." Similarly, Yang said, "Everyone will say, 'Hey, how's everything going?' And then, I mean, it makes you feel like you got some friends at the very beginning, but not really." And, Wang said he would tell newcomers from China, "[Americans] say let's do something together not actually means it. So you need to understand that people sometimes are just saying it, not actually going to do it. Don't expect people to do it so much."

A few people described Americans' friendliness to be off-putting. For instance, Jie described four different levels of friendship, with one being the first stage and four being the most intimate. He explained that sometimes he felt like Americans were acting as though they were already at a deeper level friendship with him, even though they had just met. He told a story about a time a new acquaintance offered to give him a ride somewhere. Jie said,

And the first, "Hi, Jie! I know you don't have car. I can drive you." But I think that's very close friends do. At first you give me level three, or level 3.5. I'm confused about that.... 'That's OK. You don't need to drive me.' And I feel very so weird. Why do you drive me? You want to take something from me? I will feel uncomfortable, so I just give level one. But he can't feel I give the level one. He still give me level 2.5! I feel, that's, that's too much. So we can't become very close friends.

Others did not seem to mind the friendliness; however, they found it difficult to develop a deeper friendship with their American friends. Ping explained it like this:

American people seem like very open, very nice, but uh, you know, I had some kind of experience like this. Which is, when you get to know them further, well, they may not be that open. Or that friendly. But maybe at the very beginning they are trying to be polite or something like that. But if you wanna go further, maybe they are like, "OK. Just stop right here." Right there, I mean, that's like a comfortable zone. So that's enough.

Later he went on to say,

At the beginning they are very friendly. But when you want to go further or deeper, they may not recognize you as a, uh, I don't know, as a similar person or as someone who actually could be close to or someone you feel really, really comfortable with.

Yang, Wang, and Jun also spoke about their relationships with Americans remaining at a superficial level. Yang said, "They are very nice, very friendly, but that, it seems like that stays on the surface level." Likewise, Wang said, "Emotionally communication is I think is a very lack. Just is a very talk on a very surface." Also, Jun stated, "Yeah, sometimes I just want to go to some deeper, deepen the the communication, but it's hard."

Chinese way of thinking. A few participants explained that some Chinese students have difficulty making friends with Americans because they are stuck in what Qiang called the "Chinese way of thinking." He said,

Actually, I don't have a lot of friends from China because uh I think mainly one thing all the students from China, they don't recognize. I mean, when they first came here, they don't realize they're in a different culture, they're in a different country. Most of them think everything is the same here and in China. Like, living or travelling, commuting to work to school. Actually it's completely different things.

Qiang continued on to give examples of the Chinese way of thinking. He said that new students insist on living in the same apartment complexes Chinese students have been living in for the past several years, even though better options are available. When looking for a place to live, he said, "The first thing they will ask. Oh there are a lot of Chinese live there?" Another example he gave was that many Chinese students refuse to drive a car because in China they did not have to drive.

Li put it like this:

They are very stubborn. They insist on the traditional Chinese food. They insist on the traditional Chinese values. They do not want to change. And they have no, at least no strong interest in different culture. Maybe that is the reason why they do not have strong interest in making friends with American.

Tang said, “Maybe the most of the reason for why Chinese people always concentrate on Chinese is because they didn’t change their customs, you know. You know, this is America.”

And, Jun acknowledged that when he first arrived he expected life in the US to be more like his life was in China. He said, “When I, before I come to [this state] I just image all the things happen in a Chinese way, but it’s not happening like that.”

Chinese Circle

In Central City, Chinese residents have developed their own community. One word that participants continually used to describe the Chinese community that they were a part of was “circle”. “We got that like a living circles,” said Jun, a doctoral student in educational psychology. He went on to say, “It’s looks like we still, even we are living US, but we still in the middle living circles which surrounded by all the Chinese peoples.” He also said,

If I got some day I have no classes I always talk Chinese, talking Chinese with my Chinese friends...Never see American, never speak the American words in some days. So that’s it lets me feel like still in China...I think Chinese peoples always got those circles...It makes me feel safe. Even if I stayed in my Chinese circle.

During the focus group interview, Xu said,

Chinese students tend to be with Chinese students. So it feels like we are still in China. We are making friends with Chinese and speaking Chinese all the time. And it just like you separate a small circle in the US. And just for Chinese.

Huang agreed with him: “Always making, they always make a small circle of Chinese.

Everything is from China with like a comfortable zone.” And, Zhu jokingly called his circle of Chinese friends the “US of China.”

Additionally, during Na's interview, she also used the word circle. "And they have their own community. Their own small circle with Chinese people." Likewise Qiang stated, "[Some Chinese students] will be closed in their own, what do you call, a circle or relationship." Liang, a visiting scholar also used the word circle to describe the Chinese scholar community in Central City.

Jun explained the purpose of forming a Chinese circle: "There is always like we are Chinese so we sharing some of the same interesting points, and we sharing the same beliefs and some so. That's the reason we come together." Likewise, Huang explained,

Like, as an international student I always looking for the people who come from the same place. The feelings more like finding my home. We have, we may have some habits, so we, the international students, start not communicating with um American students.

Min said that some Chinese students "don't want to make friends with the people who speak English. So they make friends with each other." And, Yang said, "Chinese people tend to group together very often." Jie also said, "Chinese want to make friends with Chinese and not Americans." Na gave her reasons for mostly having Chinese friends: "Because we need to form that kind of community and to share. We have the common experience, maybe the same problems. And then we communicate. We can support each other."

Although Qiang has several American friends and few Chinese friends, he acknowledged that not having American friends worked for some people. "I know a lot of Chinese students, they don't have any local friends, they just mix up with other Chinese students and still live a good life here." However, Ying criticized Chinese people who only had Chinese friends. She said, "Like, your English proficiency is really low and you still, you just still hang out with Chinese people? There's no difference. You can just stay in China. What's the difference?" And Jing described her life in Central City like this:

And still live with Chinese people. And also I cook Chinese food and I live in Chinese way. And when I hang out, I hang out with my Chinese friends. It's more like my lifestyle is the same while I'm in China.

Lack of Americans at Events

Another challenge to making American friends was that even when the participants went to events to meet Americans, often there were more Chinese attendees than there were Americans. For example, most of the participants interviewed had a host family, so they had the potential opportunity to interact with a local American family. However, a few participants stated that their hosts often were matched with several students, all of whom were Chinese. Consequently, when the participants went to their host families' homes, they interacted more with other Chinese students than with Americans. Yu said this about his host family:

I will say they are really nice people, but because they invite a lot of people, a lot of Chinese students, yeah, we didn't really have time to talk to them much. But we just talk maybe five minutes about our lives.

Similarly, Jun said, "We got like seven to eight Chinese peoples in that [host] family. But all Chinese."

One participant mentioned being a member of First Friends, an on-campus organization designed to encourage Americans and international students to interact. Like with the host families, there were more Chinese students than Americans. Ping said,

It's called First Friendship....I believe that organization is built by some college students here, and they just, they basically recruit international students and native American students and mix them up by assign them to small groups. So to make sure that in each group you have some international students and you also have some American students....My group, there are like five people in my group. Yeah. But actually only one American student show up. And the other one is also Chinese student. The rest almost never show up.

In addition, depending on their major, a few participants did not have many opportunities to meet Americans through their course work. For example, at the time of her interview, Li, a

PhD student in electrical engineering, had only taken courses with Chinese professors. She also noted that most of her classmates and lab mates were international students. She said, “Like, in my lab most the students maybe two thirds are Chinese. And they always sit together, like you said. And the other one third is Indian, and they stay together and they speak Indian and we speak Chinese.”

Efforts to Overcome Challenges

Most of the participants expressed that they believed it was important to have friends who were Americans while they were living in the United States. As Min said,

I think it's very important because like in my opinion I think American people is more friendly than Chinese people. And if you always stay with them you can improve your English, and you can know more things about the America. They will tell you something, some American culture.

Xu said, “Well, uh, I think, um, if I don't, um, Americans, or make friends with Americans, I will, I won't meet my goal of studying abroad because I have to get into Americans' culture.”

Similarly Jun said that if he did not have American friends, he might as well have stayed in China. He said, “Sure. It's really [important]. Why? Otherwise why we come here?” And, Zhu said, “I think why it's important to have American friends is they know much more than we know about the America. Of course, language and the college. And other things. And culture also. So they can teach me a lot.”

Because they thought it was important to have American friends, several of the participants made an effort to develop friendships with Americans.

Put Themselves Out There

Many of the participants expressed that in order to make American friends, Chinese students must take the initiative and put themselves out there. For example, Min said,

You can't wait them to ask you something. You should ask them first. Like if sometimes I want to go to the activities, but maybe no one asked me if you want to come. So, I will text them and tell them I want to come to the activity and ask them if you can pick me up. So I think you should, what's the word? Yes, initiate. Initiative.

Likewise, Yang said, "Don't be afraid of stepping up. Like don't be afraid of being the first one to start the conversation." Also, Na said,

So at first you need to open yourself. Not close your minded. So you need to open minded. And you need to active. Don't wait for others come here to talk with you, to make friends with you. You need to go out. Yeah. To try. Actively.

Wei said that he actively tried to be involved and meet people. He said, "I go to those more academic presentations or brown bags, and then try to join the discussions. And then trying to talk to people and then see if we can make friends." Wang said, "You can be the initiate to invite your American friend to do something you both like to do." And, Yu said,

Just go out to talk to people. There's not really any barrier to make American friends. Just depends on you. If you open to make American friends, then you will have a lot of American friends. I don't think any, there will be any difficulty to make American friends if they are willing to.

Tang said, during the focus group interview, "If I give someone advice to a Chinese freshmen, probably I will say that don't wait for the opportunity. You need to struggle for the opportunity." The other focus group members agreed. "You can't wait for them," said Zhu. "Maybe go to activities. Like Coffee Hour," he added. Tang responded, "And express your own opinion frequently. Yeah, I think this is really good way to do." In his one-on-one interview, Jun said something similar: "Just don't be afraid. Just don't be shy. And be direct to them. And yeah. If you want to, if you want to say anything in your heart, just say it." Ming also had advice for new students. He said,

My advice is don't be shy. Just talk. If other people that are interesting about you, this a really good way to make friends. 'Cause sometimes I think the hard to make friends is maybe some people is really shy or some people is afraid, is really afraid to have the first

step. And the first step is really hard one, but if you have the first step, the other things will be going easy. So, I will tell them just try. You can do that.

Some of the participants gave examples of how they actively sought opportunities to meet and talk with Americans. For instance, Lei and Wei said they were involved in community service. Wei said, “So through those activities, like community service. Through those activities you can get to know not just American students, but also locals.” He also said, “Whenever I see locals I would try to be friendly.”

During my observations at Coffee Hour, I noticed that Fang was a good example of a Chinese person putting herself out there. As a new student she chose to go to Coffee Hour to meet Americans. I observed her talking to Americans at Coffee Hour on three different days. Her behavior was different from what I observed in some other Chinese students. For example, on my first day of observations, I saw a group of four Chinese men who stayed together in a group the whole time and did not speak to anyone else. They also did not stay long. They simply arrived, got some food, stood in a small circle and talked briefly with each other while eating, and then they left. I saw something similar to this on most of the days I observed. There was usually a group of Chinese students who arrived and left together and did not speak to anyone, other than me, while they were there.

Distance Themselves from Other Chinese

A few participants made a point to tell me that they were different from the majority of Chinese students. During our interview, Liang and I started talking about collectivism and individualism. “I don’t like [collectivism]. I don’t like it,” Liang said. “I like American culture.” Likewise, Jun also expressed a preference for American culture. “I’m pretty like American style [of communication]. Yeah. Prefer to the Chinese way,” Jun stated.

When I spoke with Li, she contrasted herself to other Chinese students. When speaking of her Chinese classmates she said,

And actually they do not like American food too much. I like it. I like it, but they don't. I think for Chinese students, especially for guys, they are very, how to say, they are very stubborn. They insist on the traditional Chinese food. They insist on the traditional Chinese values. They do not want to change....They always stay together, and they do not think that is a problem. But I don't like that....I don't want that. But it seems they are OK with this. At least in my group I know some students they stay here for maybe three, four years, but I don't think they have American friends. I don't want to be like that.

Similarly, Qiang also contrasted his behavior to that of other Chinese students. He told me that most Chinese students, when they first arrive here, will ask other Chinese people for advice. However, Qiang does not do that. He explained,

Every time, say if I come to a new place I'll ask a local people, 'What do you do here? What do you eat? Where do you live? Where are the good places around here?' But people from China tend to ask someone have been there maybe two years. We call it senior students. We just ask a senior student, 'Where do you live or where do you eat?' So people repeat everything. We don't like to create new way to do something. But not everybody will do this. Not every student will repeat. But a lot. A lot will do this....But I'll ask locals.

In addition, Wei talked about purposefully adjusting his definition of friendship in order to adapt to the culture. In this way, he distanced himself from other Chinese students' view of friendship. He said,

Yeah, I think here in the US. I think, whenever I come to visit a foreign country that the definition of friends kind of changes a little bit. Because when I'm in a foreign country, obviously I am getting to travel and I am not quite familiar with the local customs and practices. And at this time I need the locals to help me because they have more knowledge on certain things. So, for the purpose of being, in order to survive, then I will try to make more friends and then try to lose some of that definition of friendship. So whenever I see locals I would try to be friendly. Try to make as many friends as I can.

Going to Church

Almost all of the participants said that going to church or Bible study was a good way to meet Americans. All of them said they had been invited to church and Bible study. "Other than

class time,” said Tang, “maybe the most time international students can meet with American students is in the church.” Also, Jing said, “But most of time like Chinese people don’t have any religions, so but, I would recommend them to go to church, ‘cause that’s more open and friendly place....It’s just a place to make friends.” Min thought going to church was a good idea as well. She said, “And maybe go to the church because the people in the church usually are very kind and friendly. They really can make friends with others.” And, when I asked Li why she went to a Bible study, she responded,

At the beginning [going to Bible study] was just because I want to learn English. Because I just come here, I have zero friends. And I feel a little difficult to speak English, so that is very good to study English and make some friends.

Wei told me he had attended church a few times, but only to hear his American friends sing. However, he speculated on why other Chinese students attend church when they are in the United States:

So, I think that for the Chinese students, I’m just assuming, they don’t see church for more of a religious perspective. More of a utilitarian perspective. Um, yeah. And yeah, so making friends with people in the church are not that hard. I think.

Similarly, Na said, “I know that so many Chinese students go to church, but I don’t know the reason why they go to. Probably it is a kind of place to socialize with each other.” She later said that some Chinese students will attend church the first few weeks of the semester to meet people, but then stop going once they have made a friend.

There were a few participants who had never been to church but still thought it was a good place to meet Americans. For instance, Yang said, “I think go to church is a good way to make friends with American people, even though I don’t do that.” Huang also saw the potential to become friends with people at church, but expressed that he did not want to do that. He said,

You can’t deny that people there are really friendly. Um, I mean those Christians, they will help you and they won’t claim for anything. Um, but, um, Chinese students,

however, Chinese students are growing up in an environment that has no religious belief. So, for me I only believe in science. So I don't want to accept a god. I think that's ridiculous. So that's a conflict between my culture and their culture. So I don't want to go to the church. Even if I can practice English or make friends with someone in the church, but I don't want to do that.

In addition, Chen expressed frustration with a friendship he had developed that seemed to center around attending church. He said,

And the, one friend in America, who is believe god and he will, every time he will ask me to go to church. And in Church they, we talk to each other, but only in the church. Yeah, only talk in the church.

Similarly, Lei expressed frustration that it was difficult to find American friends who would talk about something other than religion and the Bible. He said,

Since most of my American friends are Christians, so the majority things we talked about is about Bible. So, sometimes. It is like hard to find somebody like who you know, how do you say, who can provide an open topic, but not about the Bible, only the Bible.

Moreover, he had met one American who stopped being friends with him when Lei said he did not want to talk about religion. Lei said,

But I do have one friend like if I, you know, there is like a kind of wars, if I don't trust the god, or something. He like, after he asked me about that, my opinion about if I believed the Bible, and since I, you know. So, like since I don't know much about Bible, I didn't say yes. So, he didn't answer me. Just forget me. Yeah. We didn't connect with each other after that.

Summary of Results

In summary, in Chapter IV I presented the results of this study. The three themes were Chinese conceptualization of friendship, challenges to becoming friends with Americans, and efforts to overcome those challenges. As I stated in Chapter III, the three themes include focused codes (explored in Chapter IV as subthemes) and inform one another. I elevated one theme, Chinese conceptualization of friendship, to also be a theoretical code. This code encompasses all the themes, focused codes, and initial codes. In the next chapter I present my interpretation of

these results, present the substantive theory constructed from the results, and give my recommendations for how this study could inform practice and future research.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter, I discuss how my findings answer my three research questions, which were 1) How do Chinese students conceptualize the phenomenon of friendship? 2) What are the challenges Chinese students face when becoming friends with Americans? 3) How do Chinese students strive to overcome those challenges? I also explain the substantive theory that I constructed based on those findings. This theory is directly related to the theoretical code “the Chinese conceptualization of friendship” that emerged during the third cycle of coding. Then, I explain the implications this study has for higher education administrators who work with international students, and I make recommendations regarding further research.

Research Question 1: How do Chinese Students Conceptualize the Phenomenon of Friendship?

There were three categories in the data that answer the first research question. The first relates to the amount of time it takes for friendships to develop. According to the participants, Chinese require more time to become friends with someone than Americans require. The second category deals with reciprocity and its use in maintaining friendships, and the third describes group mentality.

Friendship Development Takes Time

The first subtheme that emerged from the interviews and that helps answer the first research question is the idea that friendship development takes time. By this I mean that when in the United States Chinese students tend not to rush into a friendship. Instead, they allow it time

to develop. However, once it has developed, the friendship bond is tight. The participants contrasted this view with how they saw Americans acting. They noted that Americans will often immediately begin a conversation with someone they have only just met. Conversely, in Chinese culture people do not normally strike up a conversation with a stranger; there has to already be a connection in place. Therefore, Chinese students will either try to become acquainted with a person with whom they share a mutual friend, or they will wait until some time has passed before making an effort to get to know someone. A few participants noted their frustration with not having enough time with classmates to even begin to form a friendship. As Jun said, “sometimes we just shared, um, three hours per week, yeah, so it’s not enough to establish some a firm relationship.”

As Hofstede (2001) explained, in collectivist cultures people are typically born into a social network. For instance, in China a child might become friends with the children of his or her parents’ friends. In that case, there is already a relationship in place—between the child’s parents and the friend’s parents. Other friendships might develop over time because the child goes to school every day with same children. In my study, a few participants explained that this was how their friendships in China had formed. A few said that they had met their closest friends when they were children because they went to school together.

Friendship Maintenance through Reciprocity

The second subtheme is friendship maintenance through reciprocity. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, several participants spoke about the importance of gift giving, helping one another, and returning favors. All three of these aspects are essential to maintaining a good friendship, according to the participants. In regards to gift giving, Ying said, “You have to give gifts to maintain friendship.” In addition, Jing and Wang explained how friends should give gifts of

either equal or greater monetary value to each other. They explained that if a friend does not give a gift at an important event, such as a birthday, this would hurt the relationship. Moreover, Na spoke about how for Chinese people gift giving is an art, and both she and Wang talked about being offended by gifts that Americans gave because the gifts were generic or inexpensive.

My initial review of the literature did not reveal any discussions on the Chinese custom of gift giving or its importance to friendship. However, in the field of business, more specifically in consumer marketing, researchers have studied gift giving within Chinese culture (Gao, Ballantyne, & Knight, 2010; Liu, 2007; Joy, 2001; Wang, Razzaque, & Keng, 2007). One of Joy's (2001) participants shared a story about forgetting a friend's birthday and searching for the "right gift" to earn her friend's forgiveness (p. 244). Joy's participant's story lines up with my participants, especially Ying, Jing, and Wang, said about the importance of gift giving. Similarly, Gao et al. (2010) stated that "gift giving is a common activity to show the strength of interpersonal relationships between Chinese" (p. 268), which also aligns with the findings of this present study.

It is understandable that the Chinese perspective on gift giving might cause difficulty when Chinese students and American students try to befriend each other. As both Na and Wang pointed out, they felt offended by the gifts Americans gave. Moreover, Ying expressed confusion over who is expected to give gifts to whom in American culture. She said,

But here you don't do that [give gifts] as often, or it's not OK for you to do that. For example, between you and your professor. You're not OK to give money or expensive gifts. That's one of the biggest differences for me.

The second aspect of friendship maintenance for Chinese students is the importance of helping each other. Almost every participant mentioned that friends should help one another, and they provided several examples of receiving help from and providing help to friends, whether

they were Chinese or American. Jing mentioned that for Chinese people, helping their friends is obligatory. “It’s part of the friendship pact,” she said. According to Brown (2009), one of her Chinese interviewees complained that she did not receive help from Americans but did receive help from other Chinese international students. Brown concluded that one of the reasons Chinese students self-segregate is because of the help they can provide to each other. While this present study and Brown’s (2009) had different purposes, both Brown and I found that helping each other is an important aspect of Chinese friendship.

The third aspect of friendship maintenance is returning favors. Wang, Jing, Yang, and Yu all mentioned that reciprocation was an essential part of friendship. Kitayama, Duffy, and Uchida (2007) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) explained that returning favors is especially important in interdependent cultures, such as Asian cultures. It is not simply that it is important to help, as noted in the paragraph above, but returning favors in an equal way is also important. During his interview, Wang explained that the favors do not have to be the exact same thing, but the magnitude of the favors or the time and energy extended in performing the favors should be of near equal value. What Wang said aligns with what Kitayama and colleagues (2007) called “reciprocity monitoring” (p. 155), which refers to one keeping track of how much help one has received from a friend so that one can return the favor in an equal way.

All three of these aspects fit together to form the Chinese conception of friendship maintenance. In other words, all three of these things, gift giving, helping, and returning favors, are necessary to maintain friendship.

Group Mentality

The third subtheme is group mentality. The participants talked about the group mentality in several different ways. Some of them spoke of it metaphorically, like Jie who said in regards

to his friends, “We call that sitting in one boat.” He explained that if friends do things together and help each other they will sail smoothly, but if they do not help each other and work together, the boat will tip over. Other participants, such as Wei and Wang, spoke of how Chinese friends tend to be more deeply involved in each other’s lives. They both contrasted this with their observation of American friends who tend to maintain some distance and independence even among their closest friends.

The group mentality aligns with what Kitayama, Duffy, and Uchida (2007) said about interdependent cultures. In such cultures, people tend to think of themselves in relation to others. In addition, Markus and Kitayama (1991) pointed out that people in independent cultures, such as the United States, tend to have a different view of privacy than people from interdependent cultures. When I interviewed Liang, he also highlighted this cultural difference. Liang said, “I think the really difference is that privacy. The concept of privacy.... For example, some topics in China, the Chinese people talk, family, income, marital status. That Americans feel annoyed. They don’t share the same concept of privacy.”

Because the participants all came from an interdependent, collectivist culture, their view of friendship included a focus on the group rather than the individual. All three of the themes related to the first research question also relate to collectivism or interdependency. First, Chinese people maintain their friendships by giving each other gifts, helping one another, and returning favors. These maintenance methods demonstrate a focus on one’s relation to others. Second, the fact that participants expressed that friendship among Chinese people takes time but once the friendship is formed the bond is tight also relates to collectivism. Third, the group mentality the participants spoke of also pertains to collectivism.

Research Question 2: What are the Challenges Chinese Students Face When Becoming Friends with Americans?

The participants mentioned several challenges that they encounter when trying to become friends with Americans. These included language and knowledge background, cultural differences, the Chinese community, and the lack of Americans at cross-cultural events. A few participants mentioned making friends with Americans is difficult, and one person whom I interviewed informally during Coffee Hour said he did not have any American friends, despite having lived in the United States for five years.

Language and Topics of Conversation

Several participants referenced the fact that English was their second language as a challenge to becoming friends with Americans. This finding is congruent with the results of Banjong's (2015) study, which found that language was the greatest challenge for international students. Indeed, several scholars have pointed out that international students struggle to communicate in English (Andrade, 2007; Brown, 2009; Kwon, 2009; Lin, 2012; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Sovic, 2009; Zhang, 2016); however, most of those scholars focused on how international students' language skills affected their academic success, not how it affected friendship. My participants explained that even though they knew English well enough to pass their courses, they still struggled with speaking to Americans. They talked about being afraid to speak and not understanding idioms and slang. Moreover, many participants noted that even if their language skills were excellent, they sometimes struggled with the topics of conversation because they lacked the background knowledge that the Americans had. For example, a few participants stated that they had trouble participating in conversations about American celebrities or sports because they were unfamiliar with those topics.

Cultural Differences

Another challenge to making friends that the participants mentioned was cultural differences. Prior research (Andrade, 2007; Leong, 2015; Lin, 2012; Valdez, 2015; Zhang, 2016) has shown that international students sometimes struggle with cultural differences. Similar to the studies on language, however, these studies also focused on how cultural differences affected classroom performance or academic success, not friendship formation. A few of my participants mentioned that Americans did not understand Chinese people or the Chinese culture. For example, Tang said he was insulted when an American student asked him if he ate dog. In addition, Tang and a few other participants mentioned feeling annoyed when Americans assumed that all Chinese people value communism over capitalism. This feeling of their Chinese culture not being understood aligns with a finding from Sherry, Thomas, and Chui's (2010) study: 60% of their participants, all of whom were international students, noted they felt as though Americans misunderstood their culture. Furthermore, Sherry et al. (2010) found that Chinese students were more likely to feel misunderstood than students from other countries.

The biggest cultural differences that my participants said caused difficulty when making friends was American's friendly behavior and the Chinese way of thinking. Several participants expressed being confused by how friendly Americans were even when they had just met. Some were turned off by the friendliness, such as Jie who said, "I feel very so weird....So we can't become very close friends." Others misinterpreted Americans' initial kindness and friendly behavior as a sign of true friendship, only to later realize the Americans did not consider them friends. Several participants gave examples of that. Tang, for instance, said an American student said they should hang out, but then they never did. Likewise, Ming mentioned an American who said he could go with him to a party, but then he never followed up with Ming.

The other prevalent cultural difference was what one participant, Qiang, referred to as the “Chinese way of thinking.” He and other participants described Chinese students who refuse to adapt to the culture as being stuck in the “Chinese way of thinking.” Examples participants gave included only eating at Chinese restaurants and purposefully choosing to live in apartment complexes where many Chinese people resided. Participants also noted that they thought this type of behavior made it difficult for some Chinese students to make friends with Americans.

Chinese Circle

Related to the Chinese way of thinking is the theme Chinese circle. Several participants used the word circle to refer to the community of Chinese people living in Central City. A few participants stated that because of this circle of Chinese friends, they still felt like they were in China, not the United States. Bochner et al. (1977) found that international students receive emotional support from conational students, and Chavajay (2013) also found that international students gain support from other international students, although he did not differentiate between conational and multi-national networks. It is not surprising that my participants also looked to other Chinese people for emotional support and friendship. Like Jun said, “It makes me feel safe.”

My findings also align with what Brown’s (2009) study found, which was that international students form conational networks immediately after arrival in the States. For some of my participants, they even started to form networks before arrival by connecting with other Chinese students through social media. Moreover, Kusek (2015) found that international students were drawn to people of similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds because such people brought a sense of comfort and familiarity. My participants also stated that their Chinese circle made them feel at home.

While forming a conational network is important for Chinese students because of the emotional support and feeling of home that the network can provide, several participants expressed that the Chinese circle also presented a challenge for them because it was difficult to break away from the network and interact with Americans. International students that exclusively are friends with conationals are what Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) referred to as “self-segregators.” None of the participants that I interviewed formally would be considered self-segregators because they had friends who were not Chinese; however, a few participants said they knew of other Chinese students who refused to try to make American friends and exclusively spent time with Chinese people.

Lack of Americans at Events

A final challenge that participants mentioned was the lack of American attendees at events on campus or in the community. For example, most participants had had a host family their first year in the United States. The participants explained that this was something they had the opportunity to sign up for at orientation when they first started their studies at Higher Learning University. They were then matched with a family who, in some cases, invited them over for dinner or invited them to do other activities together, such as attend a football game. One participant mentioned that he and his wife became close friends with their hosts. Others, however, complained that their host families hosted several Chinese students. Consequently, when my participants were invited over for dinner, there would be more Chinese students there than Americans. Likewise, one participant said he was a member of First Friends, an on-campus organization meant to connect international students with American students. Ping said that the group he was assigned to consisted of a few Americans and a few international students, but only he, one other Chinese student, and one American would show up to meetings and events.

Research Question 3: How do Chinese Students Strive to Overcome those Challenges?

Most of the participants said that it was important for international students to become friends with Americans despite the challenges. During the interviews, the participants shared strategies or advice on how Chinese students can make American friends. There are three themes from the interviews that answer the third research question: How do Chinese students strive to overcome those challenges?

Put Themselves Out There

Several participants emphasized the importance of Chinese students not waiting around for Americans to approach them. Instead, they said, Chinese have to take the initiative. Wei gave an example of attending academic presentations that his department put on. He said when he attended such events he always made it a point to join the discussion and talk with Americans. Others talked about becoming involved in community service or going to Coffee Hour and other events on campus. A few of the participants contrasted their advice with what they observed many Chinese people doing: simply playing computer games in their apartments and not taking the opportunities to interact with Americans.

Furthermore, two things participants kept repeating was, “don’t be shy,” and “don’t be afraid.” For example, Yang said, “Don’t be afraid of stepping up. Like don’t be afraid of being the first one to start the conversation.” And, Ming said, “My advice is don’t be shy. Just talk.” Sovic (2009) wrote that many of the Asian participants in her study said that they were shy, and Heggins and Jackson (2003) noted that Americans might perceive Asians as shy. In my study, two participants described themselves as shy, and two other participants said that most Chinese people are shy. Many of the participants highlighted that Chinese students need to not act shy in order to make friends.

Distance Themselves from Other Chinese

Several participants distanced themselves from the behavior of other Chinese students by telling me how they were different from the majority of Chinese people. For example, Li and Qiang both described their behavior as different from what they had observed other Chinese people doing. Li noted that her Chinese classmates only spoke to one another and only ate Chinese food, whereas she tried to talk to non-Chinese people and ate American food. Qiang said upon arrival most Chinese students immediately sought out other Chinese people for advice on living in a new country, but he said he purposefully asked Americans questions. Other participants, like Liang and Jun, told me they preferred American culture to Chinese culture. This distancing also seemed to be what the participants who advised other Chinese students not to be shy were doing. These participants implied, or in some cases, directly stated, that Chinese people are shy. One of the strategies to making friends was to try not to be shy. In other words, they tried to act differently than the majority of Chinese students.

Valdez (2015) concluded from her study of Chinese students that many of them try to distance themselves from other Chinese students in order to gain favor with American students and faculty. For example, Valdez noted that there is a stereotype that Chinese students cheat and that her participants told her that many Chinese students do cheat. Her participants, however, also noted that they themselves did not cheat. Valdez's findings are congruent with mine. My findings indicate that the Chinese students who want to make American friends purposefully distance themselves from Chinese culture. In other words, they actively try to behave differently from other Chinese people.

Going to Church

A third strategy for making friends was going to church or Bible study. Almost every participant said that attending church or Bible study was a good way to make American friends. Even those participants who said they did not want to go church said that it could be a good way for other Chinese people to meet Americans and develop friendships. While two participants said that they were Christians and that that was why they attended church, the rest of the participants who went to church noted that going there was simply to meet people or learn about the culture. As Wei said, “they don’t see church for more of a religious perspective. More of a utilitarian perspective.” This utilitarian purpose for church attendance lines up with previous research findings. For instance, McLachlan (2009) noted that 25% of her participants, all of whom were international students, said that they went to church to make friends and practice English. Likewise, Kusek (2015) reported that one of her Chinese participants went to church because the members were friendly and they provided a free meal one evening a week. Another Chinese participant said he went to church simply out of curiosity (Kusek, 2015).

Substantive Theory

As this was a constructivist grounded theory study, one of the main purposes was to build a theory concerning the Chinese conception of friendship. In order to do this, I went beyond initial and focused coding and conducted a third cycle of coding. The goal of the third cycle was to construct one theoretical code that would encompass all of the focused and initial codes. During the third cycle, I noticed there were three themes that comprised the focused codes but also overlapped and informed each other. These three themes work together to form the theoretical code. I call this code the Chinese conceptualization of friendship, which was also what I called one of the themes. I chose to elevate this theme to a theoretical code because all of

the themes and codes fit underneath it. The second and third themes—challenges to becoming friends with Americans and efforts to overcome challenges—are encompassed by the first theme. Moreover, the second and third themes are more descriptive in nature. However, the theme Chinese conceptualization of friendship moves beyond mere description and is more abstract and analytical.

Based on what the participants in this study said, Chinese students have a different conceptualization of what friendship is than American students have. Chinese students focus on the group more than the individual, and as a result they feel an obligation to help their friends and return the favor after their friends have helped them. Gift giving is also related to this responsibility to help and return favors. When a Chinese friend gives a gift to a friend, they expect to also receive one in return at a later date—for example, when it is their birthday. There is also the need to give a gift of equal or greater value. Gift giving, helping, and returning favors is related to reciprocity monitoring (Kitayama, et al., 2007) and is necessary to maintain friendship amongst Chinese.

Furthermore, for Chinese students, the bonds of friendship are tight, once they have been established; however, it may take some time for the friendship to form in the first place. This tight bond is also related to the group mentality. When Chinese students are friends with someone, they consider that person to be a part of their group. Thus, once a person is part of the group, as long as the relationship is being maintained as discussed above, the friendship is not easily severed. The fact that it takes a while for the friendship to begin is also related to the group mentality. If a person is not a member of the group, the group is suspicious of that person and it needs time to warm up to them.

This group mentality that the Chinese students have is not surprising when one considers that China is a collectivist culture. In a collectivist society, people are interdependent and group-oriented. That is to say, members of collectivist societies think of self in relation to other members of their group (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The Chinese participants in this study were born into a collectivist culture. As Hofstede explains, in such a culture “people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (p. 225). In this study, however, the in-group had been left behind in China. Therefore the Chinese students had to establish their own friendships and in-groups. Understandably, they brought their expectations and assumptions of friendship to the United States with them. Consequently they often have difficulty forming friendships with American students. Thus, they have to develop strategies to make friends while studying in the United States.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for higher education personnel, especially those working with international students. By having a better understanding of how Chinese students conceptualize friendship, administrators could gain a different perspective on friendship itself and friendship development. This new perspective could potentially cause higher education administrators to be more empathetic and understanding towards Chinese students who struggle to become friends with Americans.

Furthermore, knowing both the difficulties Chinese students often have when making friends as well as the strategies they sometimes employ to overcome those difficulties, administrators could design programs to facilitate meaningful interaction between Chinese students and American students. For example, perhaps rather than simply providing a venue and

relying on students to take the initiative to introduce themselves to others and start talking, more structured activities might be used.

Other possible implications include designing courses that teach students, both international and American, about cultural differences and intercultural communication. The purposes of such courses would be to make students aware of cultural differences, not to coerce anyone to adapt or assimilate. What the students do with the information should be left up to them. An example of one such course could be a seminar on cultural differences regarding friendship might include a lesson on how people in different cultures extend and respond to invitations. As I found in this study, Chinese students often misunderstood Americans and thought they were invited to a party or other event when in fact they were not. In American culture, inviting someone to do something is a negotiation (Wolfson, 1989). When an American says, "Let's hang out sometime," for example, they are not necessarily actually extending an invitation. This cultural phenomenon is something that could be taught in a seminar so that international students can learn how Americans typically extend, interpret, and respond to invitations.

Further Research

To investigate this topic further, a study could be conducted using the substantive theory that I constructed as a result of this study as a theoretical framework. The findings from that study then would be used to confirm, revise, or better understand this theory. It might be useful to broaden such a study to include participants from several higher education institutions across the United States.

In addition, it would be interesting to conduct a quantitative study on this topic. For example, one could design a survey based on the results of this study to find out how many

Chinese students in the United States use the strategies mentioned by my participants. Or a survey could be used to find out whether Chinese students at other institutions agree with how my participants said friendship is maintained. Moreover, quantitative research could examine how independent variables influence which strategies Chinese students use to build friendships with American students.

Conclusion

Through conducting this study I sought to explain how Chinese international students conceptualize friendship. The findings suggest that Chinese usually allow friendships to slowly develop over an extended period of time, but once the friendships have formed, they last for a long time. Moreover, I found that reciprocity, in the form of gift giving and helping, was an essential part of friendship maintenance. I also found that the group mentality was an important aspect of friendship.

From the data, it might also be surmised that because the Chinese conceptualization of friendship is different from the American conceptualization, Chinese and American students often have difficulty becoming friends. There were additional difficulties as well, such as language differences and lack of cultural background knowledge. I also found that several of my participants actively strove to overcome the challenges they encountered when trying to make American friends. These actions included putting themselves out there and distancing themselves from other Chinese students.

Understanding how Chinese students conceptualize friendship could influence how higher education administrators design and implement programs meant to encourage meaningful intercultural interaction. These programs could benefit not only Chinese students, but also any other student, international or American, who wants to engage in intercultural interaction.

Furthermore, by learning about cultural differences related to friendship, people could strive to overcome those differences and be friends with people from different cultures.

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APPENDIX A

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How do you define “friend”?
 - a. What does it mean to be a “close friend” with someone?
2. Tell me about your closest American friend here at HLU.
 - a. Describe this friend.
 - b. How did you meet this friend?
 - c. What makes this friend “close” or “good”?
 - d. How much time do you spend with them?
 - e. What types of activities do you do together?
3. Do you think it is important to have American friends while you are a student at HLU?
Why or why not?
4. What are some cultural differences you have noticed since coming to America?
 - a. Have these differences gotten in the way of making friends?
5. Is there something I haven’t asked that you think is relevant to the topic that you would like to share?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How do define “friend”?
2. What does it mean to be a “close friend” with someone?
3. Who are a few of your closest friends here at HLU? What are their nationalities?
4. Do you think that it is important to have American friends while you are a student at HLU? Why or why not?
5. What are some cultural differences you have noticed since coming to America?
 - a. Have these differences gotten in the way of making friends?
6. What things have helped you become friends with Americans?
7. Is there something I haven’t asked that you think is relevant to the topic that you would like to share?

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CERTIFICATION

April 18, 2016

Amanda Brunson
Dept. of ELPTS
College of Education
Box 870302

Re: IRB#: 16-OR-162 "Chinese and American Friendship Formation"

Dear Ms. Brunson:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies


Your application will expire on April 17, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,


Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer