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Shared Experiences and Resilience of Cultural Heritage: Chinese Students' Social Interaction with Non-Host Nationals in the United States

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Abstract: Compared to the role of communication with host nationals in promoting migrating individuals' acculturation, Chinese students' interaction with non-host nationals has not received enough attention due to the notion of dualism. The theorization of acculturation underscored by dualism has been challenged by a holistic viewpoint that considers acculturation as an additive and integrative process. Attending to the disparities of two theoretical perspectives, this study examined Chinese students' acculturation in the United States. The research findings revealed that the shared experiences among Chinese students and the resilience of their cultural heritage made their communication with non-host nationals necessary. Therefore, a more diverse environment is suggested to be created by American universities and colleges to enable the social support among international students.

Keywords: acculturation, Chinese international students, cultural heritage, shared experiences

Introduction

Acculturation is often examined within the realm of dualism, which assumes that migrating individuals' maintenance of their home cultures and acquisition of the host cultures are negotiated in dichotomous categories such as either/or (Liu, 2015). In this context, migrating individuals' identification with the host cultures and their communication with host nationals are prioritized, and this identification and the communication with host nationals are believed to benefit their psychological well-being by facilitating successful intercultural adaptation (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 1997; Gudykunst, 1985, 1988, 1995; Kim, 1988, 2001). By contrast, these migrating individuals' ethnic identity and communication with their co-nationals or co-ethnics are discouraged,

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neglected, and even viewed as barriers to the formation of the host cultural identity, especially beyond their initial phase of sojourn (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015).

The complexity and depth of global migration have challenged the aforementioned dualistic thinking (Liu, 2015; Xu, 2013). From a holistic perspective, cultural identity is viewed as a location of fusion in which different cultures are combined to generate cultural hybridity or multiculturalism, rather than demolishing local tradition and culture (Ben-Rafael & Sternberg, 2001; Berger & Huntington, 2003; Bhatia, 2007; Geertz, 1977; Kramer, 2000; Liu, 2015). Under this circumstance, studies on migrating individuals' acculturation are suggested to consider their identification with the host cultures and maintenance of home cultures to complement each other as the products of dialectical processes (Hecht, 1993; Xu, 2013). Additionally, migrating individuals' communication with their co-nationals or co-ethnics is found to be positively associated with their psychological well-being (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Compared to the dualistic perspective that is prevalent in intercultural communication, the viewpoint that recognizes the value of and rationale behind migrating individuals' maintenance of cultural heritage receives less attention (Liu, 2015). Focusing on the discrepancies of the dualistic and holistic theoretical perspectives, this study compares cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory embedded in the exploration of 25 Chinese students' acculturation in the United States.

Literature Review

Overview of International Students' Acculturation

Against the backdrop of globalization, education has been commodified on a global scale in an unprecedented way. To cope with the changes brought by their relocation to a different cultural environment, international students often go through acculturation, which can lead to bidirectional change emerging from one culture's first-hand contact with the other (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Literature focusing on international students' acculturation tends to map out these migrating individuals' acculturative stressors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Among all acculturative stressors, the language barrier is considered a major prediction of international students' acculturative stress and/or depression in host countries (C. P. Chen, 1999; Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Trice, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). International students' limited linguistic competency in the second language can intensify their academic stress in the educational environment, and further expose them to educational stressors, which makes their adaptation to a new educational environment more challenging (Hashim & Yang, 2003; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Rasmi, Safdar, & Lewis, 2009). Another acculturative stressor, the sociocultural stressor, is associated with international students' limited capabilities of establishing a new social network after leaving their home cultures (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Existing research reveals that international students with personality traits such as anxiety and introversion are negatively associated with their sociocultural and psychological adaptation (Brisset, Safdar, Lewis, & Sabatier, 2010; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Ying & Han, 2006). Additionally, the cultural distance between international students' home cultures and the

host cultures, together with their limited linguistic competence in the second language, can impede their capabilities of establishing friendships with host nationals, and thus generate their feelings of loneliness and isolation (Berry, 2003; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ying & Han, 2006). The last acculturative stressor encountered by international students is related to perceived discrimination in the host cultures (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). International students "from Asia, Africa, India, Latin America, and the Middle East often report significant perceived discrimination compared to domestic students or European international students" (Hanassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007, as cited from Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 704).

International Students' Communication During Acculturation

Disputable Communication with Non-Host Nationals

To cope with the aforementioned acculturative stressors, international students are expected to actively interact with host nationals to achieve the successful acculturation (Berry 1997; Berry & Sam 1997; Gudykunst, 1985, 1988, 1995; Kim 1988, 2001, 2015). Owing to dualism, migrating individuals' development of the host cultural identity operates contrary to their maintenance of the home cultural identity during the process of acculturation. Therefore, international students' communication with non-host nationals (their co-nationals or co-ethnics and international fellows) is ignored and even viewed as the hindrance to their intercultural adaptation (Liu, 2015). In order to successfully achieve the goal of acculturation, it is suggested that international students spend more time with host nationals and engage less in social gatherings with their co-nationals or co-ethnics, which is deemed to impede their enhancement of intercultural communication competence (Citron, 1996; Kitsantas, 2004; Pitts, 2009).

Disputing the dualistic perspective, some scholars stress that the role played by migrating individuals' communication with non-host nationals cannot be overlooked in terms of providing them long-term social support in host countries. For instance, Ward and Kennedy (1993) reported that satisfaction with co-national relations strongly predicted psychological adjustment of sojourning students in New Zealand. Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok (1987) revealed that Korean immigrants in Canada who had close friendships with their co-nationals experienced less stress. Emiko and Loh (2006) stated that Asian sojourning students in Australia who had more ties with their international fellows conducted better intercultural adjustment in general.

Two Competing Theories of Communication With Non-Host Nationals

Among influential scholarly elaborations of acculturation, cross-cultural adaptation theory provides a representative dualistic description of migrating individuals' communication in host cultures (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015). Placing adaptation at the intersection between the individual and the environment, this theory states that any individual who steps into a different culture will move along a unidirectional path of stress–adaptation–growth towards a universal end that targets the formation of intercultural personhood, improvement of individuals' psychological health, and an increase in their functional fitness in the host environment (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015).

Underscored by dualism, cross-cultural adaptation theory argues that migrating individuals have to involve themselves in the interplay of acculturation and deculturation with the goal of attaining successful assimilation into the host cultures. Acculturation, which refers to migrating individuals' acquisition of new cultural patterns and practices, will inevitably lead to deculturation, defined as unlearning of some of their old cultural habits (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015). Acculturation and deculturation of migrating individuals, according to cross-cultural adaptation theory, are enacted through separation from co-national or ethnic groups, mentally and physically (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015). Therefore, migrating individuals' ties with their co-nationals or co-ethnics is considered to function as the pulling force during their assimilation into the host culture (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015). To better assimilate into the host culture, individuals should maximize their acculturation through unlearning some of their original cultural habits and staying away from their strong ethnic ties with their co-nationals or co-ethnics (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015).

Disagreeing with cross-cultural adaptation theory, Kramer (2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2010, 2011) proposed cultural fusion theory. This theory brings into intercultural communication the concept of "*horizon*," elaborated by Gadamer (1991) as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (p. 301). As socialized human beings, individuals have been endowed with certain horizons by their historically determined situatedness that comprises their cultures and traditions. Coming from the same culture, migrating individuals share the same horizon with their co-nationals or co-ethnics. Additionally, the relocation into a new cultural milieu will expose sojourners and immigrants to many challenges and obstacles, which are shared by other migrating individuals from different countries. Due to the same or similar historically determined situatedness, migrating individuals can find common understandings and interpretations that emerge from their relocation to host countries.

Unlike the dualistic acculturation depicted by cross-cultural adaptation theory, cultural fusion theory refuses to place migrating individuals' interaction with host nationals in opposition to their communication with non-host nationals. According to cultural fusion theory, acculturation is an additive and integrative process rather than a zero-sum closed system (Croucher & Kramer, 2016; Kramer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b). During the process of acculturation, migrating individuals can maintain their home cultures, while at the same time fusing aspects of the host culture into their original cultural identities to create a fused cultural identity (Croucher & Kramer, 2016; Kramer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2010, 2011). Therefore, migrating individuals' niches and differences should be celebrated during their negotiation with the host culture, rather than being abandoned (Callahan, 2004; Kramer, 2000, 2011).

Focusing on the aforementioned disparities between cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory, this study will examine Chinese students' acculturation in the U.S. and explore the meaning of their communication with non-host nationals in America. Therefore, this study will address the following questions:

• In what aspects do Chinese students in the U.S. feel the gap between themselves and Americans?

- Why can Chinese students not adapt to the American culture and environment in these aspects?

Research Method

Participants

This study attends to compare cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory through exploring Chinese students' communication with non-host nationals during their acculturation in the US. Therefore, 25 Chinese students who were studying in a large public university located in Southwest America at the time of interviews were recruited for this study, considering the fact that their experiences of studying and living in the US. for an extended period can provide rich insights into Chinese students' acculturation in this country. These participants ranged from 21 to 31 years old, with an average age of 26 years old, and had lived in the U.S. for 2–5 years, with the average sojourning length of 3.5 years by the time of interviews. Among these participants, 13 of them were females and 12 males; 11 were master students and 14 doctoral students; 13 majored in social science and 12 in science and engineering; 21 studied with either teaching assistantships or research assistantships and four at their own expense. In order to protect their privacy, the researchers adopted pseudonyms in the research.

Data Collection

Relying on snowball sampling, researchers recruited all of the participants through their social network in the same university. Snowball sampling is appropriate for this study since it is well-suited to studying people who have certain attributes in common (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). For each participant, a semi-structured interview was conducted by the first author in their mother language, Mandarin, and in their desired locations. Semi-structured interviews were adopted by this study for two reasons. One is that the interviewer can ask planned questions based on an interview guide, and the other is that the interviewees are given more freedom to provide different descriptions of their own experiences from which the interviewer can ask unplanned questions to explore different feelings and thoughts (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

During the semi-structured interviews, each participant was asked about their communication embedded in their acculturation in the US. The interview questions were mainly developed based on two discrepancies between cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory. One was whether migrating individuals should keep away from their co-nationals or co-ethnics during the acculturation, and the other was whether their original culture can be unlearned during the acculturation. These questions included what their initial impression of the US was before they came; what differences or challenges they encountered since they came to this university; how they perceived and responded to these differences or challenges; whether they ever considered adapting to the host environment; if they did, how they conducted the adaptation; what their social circles in the US looked like; and the rationale behind their preferences. The interview questions were pilot tested, and then revised based on feedback.

Before the interview started, the first author explained to each participant the purpose and nature of this study, and provided them with a consent form with written explanations of this study. All participants signed the informed consent before interviews. With the approval of each participant, each interview was digitally recorded. Also, notetaking was utilized to record each participant's nonverbal information such as body language and facial expression. The length of each interview was 60–90 minutes, and 25 interviews were completed, ultimately resulting in 28 hours of interviews in total.

Data Analysis

Audiorecorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed by the first author, who is a native Chinese speaker. Data analysis was guided by the constant comparative method, which compares and contrasts each incident with other incidents, empirical data with concepts, concepts with categories, and categories with categories, in order to reach higher levels of abstraction and advanced conceptualizations in three steps (Charmaz, 2006). First, all data were read and re-read to locate two major common themes across all the interviews: obstacles to communicating with America and attachment to the Chinese identity. Second, data under these two themes were further compared and contrasted across all the interviews. Five subthemes emerged from this step, namely the linguistic gap between Chinese students and Americans, Chinese students' limited American cultural literacy, American ' lack of empathy, Chinese students' pride in Chinese culture, and Chinese students' sense of patriotism. Finally, excerpts under each subtheme were analyzed and combined with their contexts in the original transcripts. It was revealed that these subthemes made Chinese students' communication with non-host nationals necessary during their acculturation in the US. Additionally, memos were written down through the coding process to keep a record of research reflections at different times. The second author, who is also a native Chinese speaker, verified the accuracy of the first author's analysis. For any disagreement on the analyses, both researchers checked back with participants via email and invited them to examine whether their experiences were accurately interpreted. Based on their feedback, revisions were made.

Results

Compared to previous intercultural communication research that highlighted the importance of migrating individuals' communication with host nationals, this study attended to the value of and rationale behind their communication with non-host nationals. The interviewed Chinese students' experiences in the US provided strong evidence to support cultural fusion theory on two dimensions: their obstacles to communicating with Americans and their attachment to Chinese identity.

Obstaclesto Communicating With Americans

This study revealed that there were systematic obstacles to Chinese students' communication with Americans, even if some of them had already lived in the US for 5 years. These obstacles were attributed to three reasons, namely the linguistic gap between Chinese stu-

dents and Americans, Chinese students' limited American cultural literacy, and Americans' lack of empathy.

Linguistic Gap Between Chinese Students and Americans

Limited linguistic proficiency in the second language makes many international students feel unable to express themselves fully, and thus prevents them from taking more active roles in communication (Corder, 1983; Suarez, 2002). As long as the communication between sojourning students and host nationals was thwarted by the former's limited linguistic proficiency, the latter's reactions, verbally and non-verbally, would separate the former from the mainstream society. The highlighted difference, embodied in limited English proficiency, constantly reminded these sojourning students that they were linguistically incompetent Others in the US.

In this study, none of the interviewed Chinese students were English majors before relocating to the US. While most of these Chinese students had passed American university's admission requirements of TOEFL and GRE, their listening and speaking skills were often less than ideal. For them, low proficiency of spoken English had reduced their desire to further communicate with Americans. As one student, Wei, suggested, he felt uncomfortable when he spoke in English with his American colleagues in the lab sometimes.

> When I communicate with Americans, even I only had a small grammar mistake in my sentence; they will definitely ask me to correct myself. It's annoying. So I hang out a lot with other international students. It's not like I don't want to communicate with Americans, the reason is not that. I feel other international students treat me as one of them, even if my English is horrible, they still can understand what I am saying.

Wei's less-than-fluent oral English made him seem to be less competent than his American lab mates. Although his advisor and colleagues were pleased with his research expertise, Wei still felt that he had become an "invisible" and "forgotten" person outside the research setting. To Wei, the absence of recognition took a toll on his self-esteem. As a result, he spent a lot of time with Turkish students in his lab. Wei explained that although they could only chat with each other in "broken" English, there was a sense of "camaraderie" that led to recognition among them.

Chinese Students' Limited American Cultural Literacy

The interviewed Chinese students' feeling of being the Other was further heightened by their difficulties of understanding culturally bound conversations with Americans. Due to the culturally bound linguistic barriers, they often felt excluded from American students' social circles. No matter how hard they studied English, there was always an intangible cultural barrier in front of these Chinese students, because they were not born and raised in American culture. As Dong explained, although he could have "academia-related conversation" with Americans, whenever the conversations involved culturally bound topics, he would instantly "hit a wall." Dong explained that the most "embarrassing" times

often followed his American colleagues' jokes. The different cultural perceptions about humor made Dong a "dull" person in his American colleagues' eyes. The slow or absent reaction to the punchlines had pushed Dong further away from his daily communication with Americans. Dong's sentiment was shared by other participants, who claimed to be outsiders in American culture. Ru stated:

> American students jump from one topic to another one too fast. And their topics cover different areas, such as sports and politics. I found Americans like to talk about sports and politics. But I couldn't follow them. I knew nothing about these topics. Therefore, the topic which makes them feel funny, in my eyes, is not that funny. It's not like I am unable to laugh; they and I just have very different punchlines.

The culturally bound linguistic differences between the interviewed Chinese students and their American counterparts were attributed to the former's limited American cultural literacy, which was caused by their relocation to a new semantic field. While their previous knowledge of American culture could provide these Chinese students with some forms of basic cultural navigation, it alone was far from enough for them to thoroughly understand American culture. Therefore, they often struggled with small talk with Americans. Consequently, they were isolated from the mainstream society as outsiders in the US, and this separation further aggravated their loneliness (X. Chen, 2004). In this context, Chinese students tended to form their small circles via intra-ethnic communication in the U.S., which could provide them with a sense of belonging and reduce their loneliness in this country.

Americans' Lack of Empathy

Empathy, which refers to an individual's capability of recognizing emotions that are being experienced by others, is based on the similar or shared experience among people. However, the interviewed Chinese students claimed to have very few commonalities with Americans as a result of their different experiences and discrepancies in cultural value. Dong expressed that international students in his department could not get sufficient support and attention. Whenever Dong felt stressed or frustrated, he usually sought emotional support from other Chinese students and his Indonesian classmate. Dong stated that he did not turn to his American counterparts because he did not feel these Americans, who had never been international students before, were able to understand what international students went through.

Besides different experiences, cultural value discrepancies also accounted for Americans' lack of empathy toward the interviewed Chinese students. This study suggested that Chinese students and Americans perceived "friendship" vastly different from each other. From the Confucian perspective, friendship means a collective identity that places more emphasis on interdependency and pays less attention to the independence and privacy of individuals (X. Chen, 2004). Therefore, people with a Confucian cultural background believe in the mutual reliance among friends and tend to view friendship as a consistent persistence once friendly behaviors are repeatedly shown (X. Chen, 2004). By contrast, Americans distinguish friendship from repeated friendly behaviors. Owing to different

perceptions of friendship, the interviewed Chinese students claimed that they often felt confused by Americans' unstable "on-and-off styled" friendly behaviors displayed to them. For example, Mei once considered two of her American lab mates as friends, because they took care of her so well when she first came to the US.

> They took me to a lot of places for grocery, to buy a cellphone, and to buy many other things. So initially I considered them as my friends. For me, friends mean mutual help as long as you need. But for them, if you ask them for help and they do not want to do that, they will say No directly, even if they have the time and the capability. For Chinese, we will help each other as long as we turn a finger to help. Maybe that is how they treat friends. I do not know. It is hard for me to make friends with them.

For Ru, she said she was a little bit uncomfortable about the different meaning of friendship in the US.

> For example, yesterday we chatted very happily, and I thought we were friends. But the next day, when we run into each other, it seems that nothing has ever happened. The closeness I had yesterday did not exist. In China, we should behave like yesterday, and remain as friends. Maybe Chinese people more mutually rely on each other. Americans prefer more freedom and independence in the friendship. I do not know. But I felt a little bit uncomfortable.

Consequently, these Chinese students either communicated with other Chinese people or interacted with other international students. These two types of communication could provide Chinese students stable social support, both emotionally and instrumentally. As Cheng said:

> I hang out a lot with other Chinese people or other international students who had similar or shared experiences with me. I did not have to worry about my incapability of expressing myself completely and precisely. I know I did not fit into American culture. It is true. But I am not frustrated. As long as communication is there, I feel good, and I can enjoy my life. If I am the only international students, and all other people around me are Americans, I will feel stressful and marginalized.

The impact of intra-ethnic communication on migrating individuals' acculturation is one discrepancy between cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory. Cross-cultural adaptation theory argues that although migrating individuals' interaction with their co-nationals or co-ethnics is considered to be helpful in the initial stage, such an intra-ethnic communication is still perceived as detrimental to these individuals' successful assimilation in the long run; therefore, they are suggested to stay away from their co-nationals or co-ethnics, and focus on communication with host nationals to achieve the satisfactory acculturation (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015). On the contrary, cultural fusion theory claims that ethnic differences make life more meaningful (Kramer,

2000).   According to the interviewed Chinese students in this study, no matter how long they had already lived abroad, they always encountered the preceding obstacles that hindered their communication with Americans on a deep level.   Therefore, these Chinese students shifted their attention to their communication with non-Americans, who could better help them relieve the loneliness, and provide them with more stable and stronger emotional and instrumental social supports. Although some Chinese students developed friendships with their American counterparts, none of them stayed away from other Chinese people. As cultural fusion theory state , the interviewed Chinese students' differences should be maintained and celebrated because these differences can add new meanings to these migrating individuals' acculturation, which is an additive and integrative progress rather than a zero-sum process toward a universally desired result or outcome (Kramer, 2000).   Therefore, it is concluded that this study supported the statement of cultural fusion theory, and refuted claims made by cross-cultural adaptation theory.

Attachment to the Chinese Identity

The second discrepancy between cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory resides in migrating individuals' possibility of unlearning their original cultures. All of the interviewed Chinese students in this research denied the possibility of unlearning their Chinese identity during their acculturation in the US. To all of them, "being a Chinese" would never be changed no matter how long they had stayed in the US. According to this study, these Chinese students' attachment to the Chinese identity was exemplified on two aspects: their pride in Chinese culture and their sense of patriotism.

Pride in Chinese Culture

Several participants displayed their pride in Chinese culture. Although they had already studied and lived in the US, their cultural pride was not only persevered but also overtly manifested on some occasions. Unlike many other Chinese students, Wei always wore T-shirts with Chinese characters in a conspicuous fashion. He jokingly said that he was like a walking billboard of Chinese culture. When he was asked why he chose those unique T-shirts, Wei said:

> I am so afraid of being considered as ABC (American-born Chinese). I am a native of Beijing. If I am mistaken for an ABC, I would feel that I lost my fan'er (èŇČåĎ£ in Mandarin, modus operandi in direct translation). I spent my childhood and adolescence in hutongs (èČąåŘŇ in Mandarin, which refers to alleys composed of a narrow laneway and street in Beijing) and grew up there. I got my fan'er from there. I chose those T-shirts on purpose. I purchased them before I left China, and I wanted to emphasize my own cultural identity here.

During the interview, Wei emphasized his "fan'er" several times. As a term borrowed from the Peking Opera glossary, fan'er is used to describe a person's sense of style, manner, bearing, and demeanor in North China.   The semantic meaning of having fan'er in

Mandarin is similar to "having a unique style" in English. As Wei disclosed, his fan'er is related to his cultural upbringing in Beijing (the political and cultural center of China), and he gained his fan'er from hutongs in this city. As one of the most well-known Chinese cultural symbols, hutong is considered as a medium into which China's long history and Chinese people's wisdom are condensed (Hilary du, Bauer, Lo, & Rui, 2005). Besides the sense of cultural pride in style, Chinese cuisine also provided Wei with a strong sense of pride. When he was asked whether he cooked western food during his spare time, Wei changed his tone and said in an exaggerating way:

> Western food? It is too easy. Everyone can make a steak. There is no skill at all in Western cuisines.

It is clear that Wei's preference of Chinese food was strongly associated with his cultural pride. During the interview, Wei displayed many photos of food he made, all of which was typical Chinese cuisine that usually required many steps and longer cooking times. In Wei's eyes, Chinese cuisine was much more sophisticated than Western cuisine, and this complexity was associated with cultural pride.

Similar to Wei, Ying showed her pride in Chinese cuisine. When she talked about her impression of the US and Americans around her, she said:

> I feel that many Americans are living a very pitiful life, especially those living in this small town. The food they eat is too unhealthy. They cannot afford the food of high quality, so they go to Walmart and buy a lot of junk food, such as chips, cheese, bread, and drinks. Children grow up with the unhealthy food, and many adults suffer from obesity. All of these is because there is no way for them to eat the healthy food like Chinese. I personally still like Chinese food.

Different from Western cuisine, the Chinese diet is famous for being "well-balanced, high in fiber and low in saturated fats" (Lv & Brown, 2010, p. 1). On the contrary, the American fast food and semi-manufactured food sold in supermarkets contain too many fats and sugar, which can lead to obesity and other illnesses. Moreover, eating in China functions as more than consuming goods; it carries more social meanings as a social activity (Kirkendall, 2010). For example, Ying said hot pot could provide a good social occasion for her to chat with friends.

> I love hot-pot. It gives me a feeling of warmth. Just imagine. A big group of friends sit together and wait for the pot in the center. We wait together and can have to chat at the same time. You know? That feeling makes me very warm. But the eating habits here (the US) are not as warm as our Chinese way.

For Ru, she not only wanted to keep Chinese culture to herself but also expected to pass it on to her children in the future. Ru hoped that she could find a job in the US after her graduation. She tried very hard to improve her oral English and hoped that one day she could thoroughly understand American culture and completely understand each sentence

spoken by Americans. However, she still admitted that she felt proud of Chinese culture when facing American culture.

> I am so proud of Chinese culture. In my eyes, we do have a superior culture in comparison to the US. Yes, I want to stay in this country with my boyfriend. It is possible that my children will be born and raised in this country. But I do hope my children can learn Mandarin and Chinese traditional culture. I cannot imagine what I will do if my children have no idea of how to speak Mandarin.

Ying expressed similar concerns as Ru. She also associated Mandarin with the Chinese identity, which was an important thing that she wanted to pass on to her children in the future.

> I really cannot imagine that one day I have a baby who is born and raised in this country. How can I raise my children in this country where English is the dominant language? What if my children refuse to learn Mandarin?

A Sense of Patriotism

Patriotism is defined as individuals' attachment to their nations (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Besides the pride in Chinese culture, the interviewed Chinese students' attachment to the Chinese identity was also exemplified on their patriotism, even if they had a higher level of English proficiency and a better understanding of American culture and society. For example, Mu'Yan, who comes from an upper-middle class family in Shanghai (one of the most developed cities in China), used to have a Caucasian American girlfriend. However, their romantic relationship gradually deteriorated due to his ex-girlfriend's "constant unreasonable China-bashing." According to Mu'Yan, most of his ex-girlfriend's portraits of China were "willful arrogance and pure rudeness." He told the researchers:

> There was one time, actually multiple times, she said to me that "I will never go to China. I do not like that poor and messy country." At first, I did not react to that, that's just nonsense, and I loved her. But one time, I guess her mean comments finally triggered me. I told her that if she does not like China, that's fine with me; she does not have to go there. I will not invite her there. No matter how many problems China has, it is my motherland, my country, and my home. China is part of me, etched in my gene. It is highly improper for her to criticize my country in such an arrogant and rude manner.

To a certain degree, Mu'Yan had acculturated to the new environment in the US. Besides dating American girls, he was also well-versed in American culture. However, his strong sense of patriotism urged him to defend China, and such patriotism has made him uncomfortable even with his girlfriend.

According to cultural adaptation theory's description, Nan and Lu might rank number on and number two respectively among the participants in terms of their degree of

successful adaptation to American culture. Both of them were fluent in English, and their behaviors were much more Americanized from other Chinese students' perspective. Even Nan's American friends mistook him for ABC when they first met him. Although Nan and Lu adapted well to American culture, they would still rise up to defend China against biased judgments made by some Americans about their home country. For example, Nan mentioned that:

> I love my country. It is true that we did something wrong on some issues. But if we did not do anything wrong and the critique was based on bias and misinformation, I would definitely step out and argue with them. For example, I would do a lot of cross-checking on Tibet issue, and I will let them know you cannot criticize my country based on the one-sided argument without doing your research about the situation.

The patriotism displayed by these participants not only reflected their sense of belonging to a certain place but also enabled them to establish a close emotional bond with their home country (Osborne, 2006 Rose, 1995). As a result of patriotism, the biased judgments toward China led to these Chinese students' strong defense of their home country. This response was deeply rooted in their love for and pride in China, which was fostered as a built-in mechanism through socialization (Hague & Jenkins, 2004). Even though they embraced American culture, their identification with China and Chinese culture had never been unlearned during their acculturation in the US.

Cross-cultural adaptation theory argues that migrating individuals' successful acculturation in the host cultures requires the interplay of their acquisition of the new culture and unlearning of their original cultural habits (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2011, 2015). However, this argument underestimates migrating individuals' home cultural pride and patriotism. As the interviewed Chinese students illustrated above, their pride in Chinese culture and their sense of patriotism made it impossible for them to abandon their original culture to fit into American culture, especially when they were exposed to the biased judgments made on China. Being born and raised in a specific culture provides individuals with a perspective to explore this world. This built-in perspective will never be unlearned when new perspectives are introduced. As cultural fusion theory states, acculturation as a learning process is additive, in which new experiences will be learned, and the original culture still can be maintained (Croucher & Kramer, 2016; Kramer, 2000). Therefore, this study supported cultural fusion theory and refuted cross-cultural adaptation theory.

Discussion and Conclusions

The preceding elaboration revealed that both cultural obstacles and psycho-emotional dissonances made the interviewed Chinese students' communication with Americans unsatisfactory. The cultural obstacles were mainly products of these Chinese students' insufficient English proficiency, their limited American cultural literacy, and Americans' lack of empathy. The psycho-emotional dissonances were caused by these Chinese students' pride in Chinese culture, and their strong sense of patriotism. Owing to the cultural obstacles and psycho-emotional dissonances, the interviewed Chinese students

couldn't gain necessary social support in the US. Under this circumstance, it is reasonable for them to turn to communicate with other Chinese students and international students from different countries. The research findings reveal that if the school administrators and educators want to improve the condition of international students, they should pay close attention to fostering a more diverse cultural environment and showing more respect for their attachment to their home cultures.

Acculturation is not a zero-sum game. Although participants in this study maintained their home cultures, they still made great efforts to improve their English proficiency and learn about every aspect of American society. However, it should be noted that none of them did so for the successful adaptation to American culture. From these Chinese students' perspective, there was no need to adapt themselves to Americans during the friend-making process; on the contrary, their firm adherence to their Chinese identity inscribed in them a sense of pride and uniqueness, which was the key to winning Americans' respect. In this context, these Chinese students never avoided interacting with non-Americans, who provided them with the necessary social support, emotionally and instrumentally, during their acculturation in the US. Their experiences in the US echoed cultural fusion theory, which argues that differences should be celebrated and embraced during intercultural encounters (Kramer, 2000). Through celebrating and embracing differences between and within cultures, the balance between host and immigrant groups can be achieved toward the goal of making our world become more pluralistic, rather than mechanizing of humanity into streamlined model minorities (Sandel & Chung-Hui, 2010).

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. First, this study only used cross-sectional design. Second, the sample size and geo-location of this study were limited to the authors' institution. Third, the young international student population (whose age is below 18) was not presented in this study. Thus, future research could use a multi-loci longitudinal study design to track changes of the aforementioned cultural obstacles, and psycho-emotional dissonances of Chinese students in the US. Future studies could also compare the acculturation of adult Chinese students with that of teenage Chinese students in America.

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