Chinese International Learners’ Acculturation at an American University

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Arcadia University

Ed.D. Program in Educational Leadership

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A DISSERTATION

IN

EDUCATION

Presented to the Faculties of Arcadia University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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Abstract

In order to investigate the current status and challenges of Chinese international students studying and living in higher education institutions in the United States, and to explore strategies for integrating into the campus life in the United States, this study investigates the current status and challenges of Chinese students studying at a small, private, internationally focused university in the United States, in relation to cultural, linguistic, and academic adaptation. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews with students, faculty, and administrators, as well as observations both in daily courses and university-held social activities.

This study seeks to uncover the current perspectives of Chinese international learners and ways to help them adapt to the living and learning environment of American university campuses. This study investigates students’ own experiences and the challenges encountered by Chinese international students in adapting to American universities from multiple perspectives.

This study investigates the current situation, advantages, concerns, and challenges in relation to the impact of the academic, English language and cultural factors during Chinese international students' study abroad at American universities. Findings from this study may be relevant for both Chinese international students in the United States and Chinese students who are preparing to go to the U.S. for study abroad. At the same time, findings may also inform American university language institutes’ programs in language training, academic counseling, and social and acculturation support for Chinese international students.
Chapter 1

Education is the necessary foundation of a country and the mark of national development and prosperity (Zhang, & Zhang, 2016). Currently, education is essential in both China and the United States. Moreover, with the rapid development of educational globalization, more and more Chinese students choose to pursue higher-level education in the United States. Due to the culture and educational differences between China and the United States, Chinese students often face a variety of challenges during their study in the United States. As educational organizations, universities in both China and the U.S. are expected to develop university support to assist Chinese students in overcoming any barriers to support success.

In recent years, as Chinese-U.S. educational cooperation has become increasingly popular, and many scholars have been addressing factors that contribute to shaping the partnership between Chinese domestic universities and American universities in China. In this study, the words “America” and “the U.S.” in this article refer to the United States of America, and “international students” and “Chinese students” refer to international students, from China, studying abroad, in particular at the private U.S.-based university that is the context of this research (University A).

International students from China who are studying in American universities can encounter many difficulties and challenges, which can be analyzed in three main aspects: academic, linguistic, and cultural.

The goal of this study was to investigate student and faculty perceptions of the challenges of Chinese international students’ study-abroad status at one American university, as well as perceptions of what skills and possible future remedies might support students in new ways to be
more successful linguistically, academically, and socially. It is hoped that the findings from this study will provide future students and higher education faculty and administrators with information that can inform supports for international students before, during, and after their study in the United States.

**Context of the study: University A**

University A has been actively engaged in international education in recent years and has developed formal, cooperative, educational programs with a few Chinese universities. Chinese students constitute the majority population of international students at University A. To meet the linguistic needs of international students studying abroad in the U.S. who need intensive English language support and advanced instruction in English, University A offers a program called the English language training program.

University A has many international connections around the world but the strongest educational partner University A has in China is JS University. JS University was founded in 1902 in east-central China. It offers approximately 90 undergraduate programs, 170 master programs, and 40 Ph.D. programs in 10 academic fields: Engineering, Science, Management, Economics, Medicine, Law, Education, Literature, Art, and History. JS University employs approximately 5,700 staff members including 2,500 faculty. The current total enrollment of full-time students is approximately 33,000 of which 1,000 are international students from more than 70 countries. Moreover, JS University has signed institutional cooperation agreements with at least 125 universities in 33 countries and regions as of May 2017 (JS University document, 2017).
The partnership between University A and JS University started in 2013 and is active in the undergraduate level of Math and Actuarial science major. University A sends faculty members to teach at JS University and JS University sends visitor scholars to University A. Moreover, University A also has a group of staff, faculty, and students visit JS University during every spring holiday as a part of the international preview program. The students from JS University make up the majority population of Chinese students at University A, and the number of Chinese students from JS University has been increasing since 2013. In the Fall, 2018 semester, University A hosted 18 students from the JS University partnership. This was 45% of the total Chinese population attending University A. The population of JS University students at University A is shown by the following chart:

As of the Fall semester of 2018, University A enrolled 40 Chinese international students in total, including one student studying in the English language training program. Of that total,
32 were undergraduate students and 7 were graduate students. Students’ majors are shown in the following chart:

University A offers various academic and linguistic supports for international students studying at the school. For English language learners, the English Language Institute (ELI) of University A offers an intensive English program addressing six levels of language proficiency: Beginning I, Beginning II, Intermediate I, Intermediate II, Intermediate III, and Advanced. Second, the Office of International Affairs (OIA) at University A provides central advisory services to international scholars and students, and administrative support to joint programs and partnerships. Moreover, International Peer Associates League members (I-PALs), organized by the OIA, are trained students who help incoming international students adjust to college life at
this university. I-PALs play a crucial role in helping the Office of International Affairs throughout the year in providing support services to students such as orientation, peer mentorship, and social and cultural programming (University A document, 2018).

The background of this study is mainly based on the current situation of global education and the study abroad trend in China. With the rapid development of international education and the Chinese domestic economy, an increasing number of Chinese students choose to study abroad in a foreign country, with one popular destination being the United States.

As a country with many higher education institutions with high-quality reputations in the world, the United States attracts numerous Chinese students every single year. In the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 142,851 Chinese undergraduates studying in colleges and universities in the United States; this represents a 5.3% increase in Chinese undergraduate enrollment over the previous year. Similarly, in the 2016-2017 academic year, the total number of Chinese graduate students studying in the United States was 128,320, an increase of 4.1% over the previous year (Ma, 2017). According to a joint survey conducted by the Institute of International Education (IIE) and the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the U.S., the number of international students studying in colleges and universities in the United States during 2013-2014 was nearly 900,000, of which the largest percentage were students from China (Yang & Chen, 2016). Meanwhile, Chinese international students in the United States have drawn extensive attention from scholars, relevant agencies, and parents from both China and the U.S. (Wang & Zhang, 2017).

**Purpose of the Study.** The goal of this study was to investigate the current status and perspectives of Chinese international students at University A in relation to their experiences...
studying abroad, by means of qualitative research methods which included one-on-one interviews and classroom observations. The questions guiding this investigation were:

1. What are the academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges Chinese students face in studying at University A in the United States?
2. How are these challenges formed and why?
3. What are the perspectives of university administrator/faculty toward Chinese students?
4. How can universities and educators in both China and the U.S. effectively support Chinese international students in relation to identified challenges?

To address these research questions, a qualitative, phenomenological case study was designed in order to seek international Chinese students' and U.S. faculty perspectives and suggestions. Methods used for data collection included individual interviews and observations with study participants. The researcher conducted interviews with participants using both open and closed questions and observed academic and social interactions among Chinese international students and American professors and peers.

**Significance of the study.** Since the number of Chinese international students in the U.S. is on the rise, understanding how Chinese students can prepare for and identify supports to persist through the multitude of academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges while studying and living abroad has significant benefit for educators and universities in both China and the U.S. Results of the study can also provide useful information for Chinese international students before and after they study abroad.
At the same time, this study can also provide suggestions and advice for both current and prospective Chinese international students in adaptation and get better prepared before they come to study in the U.S.

**Cultural adaptation.** When Chinese students come to study in an American university, the Chinese culture familiar to them no longer surrounds them, which can cause frustration and anxiety. Many Chinese students have difficulties understanding new social norms in communicating with others and also feel confused by uncertainty in their identity and self-awareness (Yan, 2011).

In academics, Chinese students bring with them expectations for student-teacher interactions similar to those they have experienced in China; many Chinese students typically rely on external guidance from teachers and parents and do not discuss and communicate with professors and classmates during class sessions (Fan, 2003). Pedagogy in U.S. universities has as its foundation interaction and expression of ideas. In addition, U.S. university courses commonly expect students’ independent research skills, presentation skills, teamwork skills, and academic writing skills in English, which many Chinese international students lack (Qian, 2018).

Linguistically, the exam-focused method of teaching English in China means that many Chinese students come to the U.S. with limited English language proficiency in oral and writing skills even if they have formally studied English for many years. At the same time, many Chinese students have difficulties communicating with Americans and are unwilling to participate in campus and community activities because of their limited language proficiency. Moreover, Chinese students' English language barriers are also associated with their sense of homesickness, powerlessness, and loneliness in American culture (Yang & Chen, 2016).
In daily life when beginning a study abroad in the United States, Chinese international students often experience a new and unfamiliar atmosphere and communication gaps caused by insufficient English language proficiency. Chinese international students often feel overwhelmed and lost, and many experience severe anxiety and frustration (Li, 2011). In order to ease their frustration and anxiety, many Chinese international students prefer to stay within Chinese groups. Many Chinese international students isolate themselves from both American culture and opportunities to use the English language in communication with others, which makes adapting to American culture more and more difficult (Li, 2011).

The acculturation of Chinese international students in the U.S. can be divided into four stages. First, the new social environment is very attractive to international students, and they are excited to contact and experience a foreign culture (Hu, 2016). Second, after the short time of excitement about the foreign culture, Chinese international students begin to miss their Chinese cultural environment and they begin to reject the foreign culture (Hu, 2016). At the same time, the stress caused by limited language proficiency and the insufficient academic skills begin to appear, which can cause depression and anxiety. Third, Chinese international students begin to restore interest and curiosity the foreign culture and gradually accept and adapt to the new environment (Hu, 2016). Fourth, Chinese international students begin to build their own social connections and lifestyles, and they are able to maintain a balance of academic stress, cultural differences, and homesickness in the new environment (Hu, 2016).

Hu's study represented an ideal acculturation of Chinese students studying in the U.S. but limits of time, energy, motivation, and English proficiency often prevent Chinese international
students from completing all four stages. Instead, many Chinese students try to escape acculturation by creating and isolating themselves in a Chinese world.

The current research discovered and investigated the academic, linguistic and cultural challenges Chinese international students face during their study abroad in the U.S., the results of this research also provided valuable information for universities that enroll students through study abroad programs by identifying types of supports that may be valuable to students such as new student orientation and English language services. The results may also help Chinese students to develop linguistic, academic, and socio-cultural preparation before going to study abroad and continued support when they are in the United States.

**Conclusion.** Generally speaking, the research on the adaptation of Chinese international students in American universities is a complex subject best carried out using a variety of perspectives and methods. The qualitative research design is best suited to document participants’ perspectives of the benefits and challenges in the acculturation of Chinese international students studying abroad in American universities.

This study investigated the current status and challenges which Chinese international students face during study abroad in a U.S. university by interviewing current students, faculty members, and administrators of University A, and the observations focus on Chinese international students’ behavior at both daily courses and university-held social activities. The research was based on the case study format and the gender of participants included both male and female.

The findings of this investigation may also help educators to better understand the Chinese students in the United States, and may also help Chinese students to adapt to academic
programs and cultural activities in the United States universities. The following chapter presents the theoretical and empirical research literature to-date on which this study is founded.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In recent years, Chinese-American educational cooperation has become increasingly popular, and many educational scholars have been addressing factors that shape the partnership between Chinese domestic universities and American universities in China.

At the same time, with globalization and economic advances, more and more universities in China seek to participate in global education by sending students to study abroad. In recent years, the scale of Chinese-American educational cooperation in higher education has gradually expanded. In China, many universities establish partnerships and provide study abroad opportunities with American universities.

Although studying abroad has become more and more common among Chinese college students under the premise of economic development and global integration, international students from China in American universities face many challenges and difficulties.

In the sections below, specific factors influencing Chinese international learners’ adaptation and acculturation to the American university are identified.

Definition of terms. For clarity, throughout this proposal, the word “America” and “the U.S.” refer to the United States of America, and the terms “international students” and “Chinese students” refer to college level (both undergraduate and graduate) international students from China who are studying abroad at University A in the United States.

Acculturation during study abroad. With the rapid growth of the number of international students, foreign personnel, and cross-cultural migrants in China, cultural adaptations have attracted the attention of Chinese researchers (Yu & Zheng, 2005).
Acculturation is the process and result of two or more cultures interacting with each other, absorbing and accepting each other’s traits, and increasing the cultural similarity (Li, 1988). For Chinese international students in the U.S., acculturation happens when Chinese students study abroad in the United States, and their Chinese cultural background has contact with American culture. Li (1988) also pointed out that acculturation is based on the contact between different cultures. In addition, cultural acculturation cannot be viewed as cultural change, because cultural change refers to the change of culture in content or structure, and it is the result of acculturation. At the same time, the driving force of cultural change comes from the transform in the external environment, innovation within the culture, and the contact between different cultures. Therefore, cultural acculturation is one way to cause cultural change.

In the study of acculturation, some researchers tend to assess the degree of acculturation by measuring immigrants’ language skills, career development, cultural adaptation, and other factors. However, cross-cultural personnel are highly likely to pursue adaptation in relation to professional development in the areas of academic advancement and linguistic skill, but they tend to retain their original cultural tradition on family aspects, such as marriage and diet habits (Yu & Zheng, 2005). Using Chinese international students as an example, while many of them are willing to improve their English proficiency and adapt into the American culture during their time studying in the U.S., in their spare time they prefer to enjoy Chinese food and celebrate the traditional Chinese festivals.

Cultural acculturation also includes spiritual level acculturation which is more difficult that material or external levels of acculturation (Li, 1988). Chinese international students can quickly integrate externally into aspects of the American environment---clothing, diet, and
manners--but still retain the Chinese way of thinking, such as the concept of hierarchy and
conservative ideas. The acculturation process provides the theoretical framework for this
investigation, as it forms the foundation of exploring the research questions:

1. What are the academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges Chinese
   students face in studying at University A in the United States?
2. How are these challenges formed and why?
3. What are the perspectives of university administrator/faculty toward
   Chinese students?
4. How can universities and educators effectively support Chinese
   international students in relation to these challenges (universities and
   educators both in China and in the U.S.)?

**Theoretical Framework: Acculturation**

Li (1988) argued that cultural acculturation is different due to certain social and historical
periods. In the traditional agricultural society, the social culture is in a relatively stable and
balanced state, and people adhere to the inherent customs and ethics. Under an agricultural
environment, the culture is rigid and conservative and no contact is made with foreign cultures,
because members of society are not willing to accept new foreign cultural traits (Li, 1988).
Therefore, the acculturation process will be slow and difficult. For example, the Anglo-Scottish
protestant missionary Robert Morrison visited China in 1807, which represented the beginning of
Christian Protestantism in mainland China. After the UK won the Opium War in 1840, British
missionaries desired to spread Christianity throughout China. However, as of 1949 there were
only about 700,000 Christians in China even with a population of 541 million (State Council of
the People's Republic of China, 2013). The spread of Christianity in China may indicate that in
the traditional agricultural society, people are hesitant to take the initiative to accept foreign
culture, and the process of acculturation is slow. However, Ngo (2008) claimed that “The
cultural acculturation assimilation framework, both as a social process and an ideology, mirrors
the deliberate colonization of the so-called ‘Third World’ nations and cultures by European
imperialism over the course of hundreds of years. It involves the social psychology of superiority
and domination of Eurocentric ways of being, the assignment of inferiority and otherness to
non-European people, and the gravitation toward expansion, exploitation, and subjugation.”
According to Ngo’s critique, the acculturation can also have the potential risk and the unequal
concern which is caused by the gap between the development of two cultures, including
economic strength, social development, military power and other factors.

However, in today's industrial and informational society, with the development of science
and technology and the process of globalization, traditional culture becomes less and less
restrictive to people. At the same time, the international and intercultural exchanges and
communications are becoming more frequent and in-depth, which greatly promotes the process
of acculturation (Li, 1988). For instance, due to its colonial history and international harbor,
Hong Kong is one of the most multicultural cities in China with a rich blend of cultures and a
unique character. While the majority of the Hong Kong population are Chinese, Hong Kong still
has a rich medley of Asian and European languages and cultures. Moreover, the presence of
enduring and ancient cultures in a society that has had to constantly adapt to change has created a
unique contemporary culture that is a true mixture of tradition and innovation (Hong Kong
Tourism Board, 2018). The unique integration of Chinese and Western cultures in Hong Kong
reflects the enormous advantages of acculturation, especially the innovation, diversification, and inclusiveness.

Although acculturation is influenced by various factors such as history, humanities, science, and technology, acculturation is a process of inevitably selecting and accepting foreign cultures (Li, 1988). Acculturation is gradually carried out with people's perspective and understanding of other cultures. The process of acculturation can be generally divided into three stages:

In the first stage, the two different cultures begin to have contact with each other, they are unfamiliar but curious about each other's culture, and they have different views on how to treat and accept each other's culture (Li, 1988).

In the second stage, after a period of time, both sides of the cultures have a certain level of understanding of each other, they start to choose to accept the characteristics and content of the other's culture and promote acculturation according to their own needs. During this period, the communication between domestic and foreign cultures is quite frequent, and the encounter of cultures have an impact on the inner structure of both domestic culture and foreign culture. The culture content that cannot adapt to the new situation is eliminated, and the cultural characteristics which are able to adapt to the new situation will be preserved. During this process, the cultural changes begin to appear (Li, 1988).

In the third stage, people have been able to recognize the differences between domestic and foreign cultures and the advantages and disadvantages of their own culture, so they can calmly accept cultural differences, and seek the balance between the cultural differences. At this stage, acculturation and cultural changes will appear on a large scale (Li, 1988).
Model of Chinese students’ acculturation during study abroad. Thinking about the acculturation of Chinese international students in the U.S., Oberg (1960) and Furnham & Bochner (1986) divided the cultural adaptation process into four stages, which is “honeymoon period”, “crisis period”, “recovery period”, and “adaptation period”.

In the honeymoon period, Chinese international students arrive in the host country and they are curious about all the new things and the environment around them. In the academic aspect, they are excited about new campuses, new classmates, new professors, and new teaching and learning styles; in daily life, they are exposed to foreign lifestyles. The new social environment is very attractive to international students, and they are excited to contact and experience foreign culture (Hu, 2016).

However, the honeymoon period is usually very short. After the short time of exciting about the new environment, Chinese international students begin to experience the crisis period. For many Chinese international students, this period of time consists of stress and conflict. After experiencing foreign culture, Chinese international students begin to miss their Chinese cultural environment, and they begin to reject the foreign culture (Hu, 2016). At the same time, the stress caused by limited language proficiency and insufficient academic skills begin to appear, which can cause depression and anxiety.

As the crisis period gradually passes away, Chinese international students gradually move into a recovery period. During this time, Chinese international students begin to restore interest and curiosity of the foreign culture and gradually accept and adapt to the new environment (Hu, 2016).
The final stage, adaptation, begins when things in the new environment become normal and peaceful. This is a sign that Chinese international students are integrated into the cultural environment. During this period, Chinese international students begin to build their own social connections and lifestyles, and they are able to keep the balance of academic stress, cultural differences, and homesickness in the new environment (Hu, 2016).

While there are many linguistic and academic aspects to acculturation, many Chinese international students are well-educated before they came to the U.S. and have learned English in a foreign language class, focusing on grammar, vocabulary and language rules. They know grammar rules and their reading skills may be impressive, but their listening and speaking skills may be weaker as they often have had little opportunity to use oral English before coming to the U.S. (Hafernik & Wiant, 2012). While some Chinese international students understand U.S. culture and have proficient English listening and speaking skills, their academic literacy skills may be less developed and display limited academic vocabulary. In some cases, they may have had interrupted education, which also contributes to their limited academic skills (Hafernik & Wiant, 2012). As we can see from Hafernik and Wiant’s perspective, Chinese international students may have challenges caused by English proficiency, academic difficulties, and culture shock during the acculturation. Despite the pressure study abroad can put on a Chinese international student, cultural conflicts are not necessarily a bad thing (Hu, 2016). In fact, when individuals encounter different cultures, they will constantly adapt through communication and learning, and finally achieve acculturation and the balance between Chinese culture and the U.S. culture.
Li (1988) also claimed that in most of the cases, the cultural acculturation is double looped. During the cultural contact, both sides of different cultures absorb and accept each other's content and characteristics, which enhance the cultural commonality. According to Li’s perspective, Chinese international students are not the only beneficiary during the acculturation. During Chinese students contacting and experiencing the American culture, at the same time, they also bring Chinese culture to the American campus, which makes the American campus more diverse and allows more Americans to get close to and understand Chinese culture. Therefore, intercultural communication and acculturation in the U.S. campus is a win-win situation.

However, there are also some critiques about the acculturation, Sun & Chao (2001) claimed that the western cultural hegemony means that western countries promote their material lifestyles and social values as a universal code of conduct, giving themselves a dominant position in cultural exchange and globalization. According to Sun & Chao’s perspectives, during cultural communication and acculturation, western countries often have a condescending sense of superiority with their own culture and regard their own culture as a universal standard for measuring all other cultures. In their perspectives, the western culture is “civilized” and “progressive”, while other non-western cultures are “backward” and “barbaric”.

According to Sun & Chao’s concern, the acculturation process can also have the negative impact that can cause cultural hegemony and social injustice, which shows that the awareness of anti-oppressive and social justice perspective during acculturation is very important and necessary.

**Chinese and U.S. socio-cultural differences**
Due to many subjective factors, there are many differences between China and the U.S.; those differences are developed by both cultural and historical reasons, and have an impact on students’ daily behaviors and ways of thinking.

In terms of social values, the most important difference between China and the U.S. is reflected in the different social value system between collectivism and individualism (Li & Zhang, 2008). China values the principle of unification, which emphasizes the responsibilities and obligations of individuals in the larger social group. However, American values advocate human nature, individual rights, and freedoms, and emphasize that the success of individuals are the basic component of the society. Under the impact of Chinese social values, Chinese students are more likely to display obedience with Chinese peers, and some students are afraid to step out of Chinese students’ group to hang out with American peers because they are afraid to be different from others (People’s Daily, 2017).

From the perspective of geography and history, Chinese traditional culture was established on the basis of the farming economy in a relatively closed geographical environment, and this has fostered a stable agricultural culture mentality (Liu, 2005). As a result, the concept of striving for stability and persistence is the common cultural psychology of the Chinese people. However, in terms of historical development, the United States is an immigrant country, and most of its citizens are from the European continent. They have been influenced by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment periods in European history of great discoveries. As a result, independent, liberation, innovation, and risk-taking became America's general cultural psychology (Stewart & Bennett, 2000).
In the concept of education, Chinese traditional culture is based on the Confucian tradition, which advocates respect for authority and obedience to the leadership. Confucian ethics has a profound influence on the social behavior of Chinese people, and also forms a hierarchical social system (Zhang, 2007). In the traditional Chinese Confucian education thought, the emphasis on the dignity of authority has created a strict hierarchical concept. The relationship between teachers and students is not only manifested in teaching and learning but also deepened into authority and obedience. Under such preconditions, the spread of knowledge can only be transmitted along the one-way path from the teacher to student (Hu, 2013).

Moreover, the traditional Chinese educational pattern is based on knowledge transfer. Teachers are considered as the provider, while students are regarded as passive recipients of knowledge, and students’ learning content is determined by the academic requirements of examinations. Under this model, Chinese educators highlight the importance of basic knowledge, focus on respect of teachers, acceptance of authority, and mastery and inheritance of knowledge (Ma, Qiao, & Wang, 2014).

In contrast, one of the main goals of American teaching is based on a student-centered model that emphasizes interaction. In this model, the purpose of education emphasizes not only the accumulation and acquisition of basic knowledge but the cultivation of students' innovative ability and self-awareness (Yang & Dang, 2014).

**Studies on Chinese international students in the U.S.** When Chinese students study at institutions of higher education in the United States, they bring Chinese culture to the American campus. On the one hand, having Chinese international students can increase the cultural diversity of the university; on the other hand, Chinese students also may experience challenges
caused by differences in language, culture, values and social structures between China and the United States (Yang & Chen, 2016).

**Data of the Chinese international student's population.** From the late 1970s, the Chinese government vigorously advocated international academic, scientific, and technological communication in order to promote the modernization process, and in order to achieve the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This policy led directly to the increase in student educational exchanges between China and the United States (Lampton, Madancy, & Williams, 1986).

In recent years, with the rapid development of China's economic strength, an increasing number of families encourage their children to study abroad. The United States, with its reputation for having high-quality institutions of higher education, is attracting more and more Chinese students each year. According to the data retrieved from the *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* (2016), in the 2014-2015 academic year there were 124,552 Chinese undergraduate and 135,629 Chinese graduate students attending U.S. universities. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the total population of Chinese international students studying in the United States reached 328,547, which accounted for 31.5% of all international students in the U.S.

**Themes from the literature.** Although Chinese students represent a large proportion of all international students in the United States, they are temporary members of American society, and they also face many difficulties, barriers, and challenges. Feng (1991) identified economic issues, cultural differences, academic difficulties, and language barriers as four major areas of challenge that often surface for Chinese international students during their study in the U.S.
When Chinese students leave their homeland and travel to study abroad, they often find that their original set of symbolic systems and value systems are no longer fully applicable in this relatively unfamiliar social and cultural environment (Tan, 2013, p. 78).

In order to meet their own needs of survival and development in the host country, Chinese international students have to become familiar with the new society and use various strategies to adjust their way of thinking and their behaviors to adapt to the local social culture. In order to catch up to the academic progress of peers, Chinese international students often need to invest more time in studying (Zhu, 2008, p. 24).

Tan (2013) also points out that adaptation, in both academic and cultural aspects, has a vital influence on Chinese international students’ academic achievement, mental health, and personal development (p. 78). Studying abroad often allows Chinese students to become more independent, more efficient, more confident, and enhances their attitudes toward diversity (Dong, 2017). At the same time, Sun (2012) also pointed out that after spending their time studying in the U.S., Chinese students will often face the reverse culture shock when they go back to Chinese society.

**The current status of Chinese international students in the U.S.** Due to differences in language, culture, and social structure, the cross-cultural experience of Chinese international students in the U.S. becomes more and more attractive to both Chinese and American educators. Moreover, given that Chinese students represent the largest group of international students population in the United States, a comprehensive understanding of the cross-cultural adaptation and acculturation of Chinese international students in the United States
has become one of the most important educational topics to study in both China and the U.S. (Yan, 2017).

Huang (2014) analyzed that social/cultural differences, language barriers, interpersonal relationships, academic adaptations, and self-concepts are the top five factors affecting adaptation/acculturation of international students. In order to adapt into the American environment, Chinese students need to seek the balance between their Chinese heritage and the new American environment.

Many Chinese students experience a psychological dilemma during their study in the U.S., as they realize and begin to understand that they need to adapt to the American environment in order to successfully study abroad. However, they are often unable or unwilling to change in both subjective and objective ways. In order to adapt to the new environment in the U.S., Chinese students often successfully change external aspects of living, such as daily behaviors, public manners, lifestyles, and English language skills, rather than internal, encultured Chinese national and familial cultural characteristics including religious beliefs, ethnic values, and cultural heritage. As a result, Chinese students are very likely to only superficially and temporarily adapt to American activities (Yan, 2017).

Yan (2017) also pointed out that many Chinese students have limited contacts with Americans, often only immersing themselves in academic aspects while self-separating themselves from the American society; Chinese students also seldom participate in activities with American peers. At the same time, Chinese students prefer to stay within Chinese groups; most of the social circles of Chinese students mainly consist of Chinese peers. As the result, Chinese students usually need to transfer between two different identities: The American identity...
for the academic study and career development, and the Chinese identity for the personal emotions and way of thinking.

During study abroad in the U.S., many stress factors such as language barriers, academic differences, culture shock, and economic challenges often have strong impacts on Chinese students. Lyu (2017) claimed that stress factors seldom act alone, as they usually combine with others and have the mixed impact on Chinese international students. During their study in the U.S., academic, linguistic and cultural differences can cause panic, anxiety, and the feeling of insecurity among Chinese students (Lyu, 2017).

In relation to cultural identity and adaptation, Lyu (2017) pointed out that for many Chinese international students, studying in the U.S. is a short-term period activity. During this period, academic development is the main goal of their trip to the United States. Compared with the long-term immigrant Chinese group, it is not necessary for Chinese international students to fully assimilate and adapt to the mainstream cultural life of the host country.

The challenges and barriers during study abroad in the U.S. Challenges in the adaptation of Chinese international students differ from challenges that often face international visitors and travelers because international students must also adjust to different educational systems and expectations while living for sometimes long periods of time in a foreign culture (Wang, 2011). Three particular areas which seem to challenge international students in American higher education settings are: adapting to the American style of teaching and learning; experiencing English language barriers; and adapting to differences in teacher-student interactions and expectations (Yan, 2011).
The academic aspect. In the process of academic integration, the differences among cultures, the previous educational experience, and language ability of students are several factors that affect the academic integration of students (Wang, 2013, p. 9). Chinese culture is famous in the world with an emphasis on education. For most Chinese students, wholehearted dedication to studies is not only a personal goal but also a connotation of Chinese traditional culture (Yan, 2011). According to Yan’s research, the top three motivations of Chinese international students are: Self-actualized honor sense by earning high scores, gain approval in American society through achieving high-level educational achievements, and meet or exceed their parents' expectations (Yan, 2011).

One expectation of traditional college students in the U.S. is that they will independently organize their own academic plans and establish their own career prospects during their years in higher education. However, most Chinese students typically rely on external guidance from teachers and parents. This begins as early as elementary school and continues through schooling as teachers and parents regularly assign academic goals for students to achieve. In addition, students seldom plan their own future independent of their family. Moreover, the teaching philosophy of education in China is influenced by Confucianism. Under the influence of Confucianism, teachers have absolute leadership positions, so the form of teaching is entirely controlled by the schools or teachers. Students are expected to behave as passive learners, remember the content, and follow the teachers' guidance instead of engaging in discussions and communications with the teacher as an equal. (Fan, 2003).

In contrast, the instructional culture of higher education in western countries, including the U.S., tends to be more student-centered, emphasizing students' dialectical criticism and
independent research skills (McClure, 2007). In the U.S. universities, students often need to decide their own academic direction and future plan independently and as a result, many Chinese students often feel a great deal of anxiety when they need to plan their own academic path and their own future professional career path in the U.S. universities (Yan, 2011).

In addition, the more informal relationship with American professors is an important factor in anxieties experienced by Chinese students. In most U.S. universities, students are encouraged to seek assistance from their academic advisers and professors through informal, after-class meetings, or interaction outside the classroom. As Zimmerman (1996) points out, the success of international students depends to a large extent on their relationship with their mentors. However, due to different learning habits, limited English proficiency, and intercultural communication problems, Chinese international students usually have unsuccessful interaction with their professors. This is because they are not willing to communicate with their professors and they prefer to solve problems with other Chinese students. At the same time, lacking communication with professors can also create a negative impact for Chinese international students; professors cannot receive feedback from Chinese students so the professors don’t know how to improve their teaching skills in order to support Chinese international students.

Even though many Chinese international students have already passed the required English proficiency test required to attend an American University, they often find it difficult to engage at a high level when discussing academic topics with professors and peers (Lyu, 2017).

**The linguistic aspect.** English proficiency becomes one of the first major barriers for many Chinese students in their journey to achieve success (Yan, 2011, p. 106). Although most Chinese international students already have studied English for many years before they came to
the United States, many of them still have limited English language proficiency, especially in oral communication skills. This makes it much more difficult for them to participate academically through conversation in American classrooms directly after they arrive at American universities. In addition, the language proficiency skills of students is tightly connected to their levels of difficulty completing homework. According to Yang and Chen’s research (2016), the primary reason why many students are confused in the course of completing their homework is due to the language problem rather than the academic content matter.

Insufficient language proficiency also affects Chinese students’ ability to adapt to American life. Many Chinese students have difficulties communicating with American classmates and are unwilling to participate in campus and community activities because of their limited language proficiency. Moreover, Chinese students' English language barriers are also associated with their sense of homesickness, powerlessness, and loneliness in American culture (Yang & Chen, 2016).

Yang and Chen (2016) also argue that many Chinese students agree that the goal of English training they received in China was to prepare them to pass the written language examinations, s. Before coming to study in the U.S., Chinese students must provide their English proficiency test scores, such as TOEFL and IELTS, as an important part of their application materials. Mainstream English language training in Chinese schools mainly focuses on written standardized tests, which highly value grammar, writing, and reading skills, but pays little attention to students’ communication (such as listening and speaking) skills. Therefore, the goal of English proficiency test training is mainly to help Chinese students meet the language requirement in the application, instead of truly improve students’ English language proficiency.
(Yan, 2011). Many students believe there is not enough opportunity to practice English before coming to the U.S.

Also, due to the lack of necessary contextual knowledge and cultural background, Chinese students also often lack English language training on practical cross-cultural communication skills and adaptability (Yan, 2011, p. 56). Although some students have high test scores, their English proficiency is still insufficient for studying in U.S. universities. In addition, due to this lack of language training, many Chinese students feel it is difficult to understand both academic professional language and social communication content in the U.S. (Yan, 2011, p. 106). Yan (2011) also points out that Chinese students studying on an American campus are often stressed and anxious because of their lack of English language skills, and feel the need to spend extra time on their studies compared to their American peers.

**The cultural aspect.** Prior to studying abroad, Chinese international students experience a culture that is distinct from that of the mainstream United States. Li and Wu (2010) claimed that Chinese culture promotes group consciousness, association, and collective value; it emphasizes the unity and identity of social groups and corporate value. However, western cultures typically emphasize the value of individual human rights and focus on personal freedom and success. When Chinese students come to study in an American university, the Chinese culture familiar to them no longer surrounds them, which can cause frustration and anxiety. Many Chinese students have difficulties understanding social norms in communicating with others, and they also often feel confused by uncertainty in their identity and self-awareness (Yan, 2011). For instance, Chinese students are usually not willing to disagree with other classmates’ perspectives during in-class discussion, and that often be viewed as lacking independent critical
thinking ability in U.S. classroom contexts. However, in Chinese culture, judging people’s opinions in front of others is an impolite behavior. Moreover, due to the different cultural background between China and the U.S., Chinese students are often brought up in a traditionally collective learning style. Under the influence of the culture, teachings in China focus on students maintaining a respectful and attentive silence in Chinese classrooms, with the teacher being the authority presenting information for students to absorb, not critique nor discuss. As a result, Chinese international students may find it difficult to adjust to the academic and social differences they experience within American classrooms, such as teachers’ encouragement of active participation and discussion (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

For cross-cultural individuals, the greater the cultural gap between the two countries, the more difficulty they will experience in transnational adaptation, or acculturation. The cultural differences between China and the U.S. are significant, and as a result, it is often difficult for Chinese students to adapt to the mainstream culture of the United States (Yang & Clum, 1994). In addition, in a seminal study, Perkins (1977) found that students from non-European countries, developing countries, and eastern countries find it particularly difficult to adapt to the American campus and feel particularly pressured by the cultural differences between students’ motherland and the United States. Using Perkins’ descriptions, since China's position as a developing Eastern Asia country includes many differences with U.S. culture, Chinese international students may experience difficulty in adapting. For example, many Chinese students believe that social skills and methods applied in Chinese society have proved to be inappropriate in American social culture. The difficulties of Chinese students in adapting to American culture are associated with their difficulties in participating in social interaction in the United States (Yang & Chen, 2016, p.
56). For example, when talking to their professors, many Chinese students are accustomed to avoiding eye contact because it is seen as a modest and humble behavior in Chinese culture. However, American culture values eye contact as a sign of engagement in the discussion, as well as a sign of respect for the other person.

Yan (2011) summarized two main barriers for Chinese students in adapting to the U.S. campus culture: Unrealistic expectations of what life is like in the U.S. and at American universities, and responding to their own anxiety and significant challenges by remaining isolated within Chinese student groups for socialization (p. 107). First, Yan’s interviewees communicated that Chinese students’ “cultural shock” feelings were mainly due to their unrealistic expectations in relation to study abroad experience for the United States before arrived.. Generally speaking, due to stereotypes and publicity through mass media, many Chinese students have expectations that are too high (Li, 2011): They often imagine that their future campus in the U.S. are located in a bustling metropolis which is similar to what they have seen in movies, and that college life in the U.S. is relaxing and allows plenty of time for entertainment. After they arrive in the U.S. campus, they realize that the campus life in the U.S. is not like what they thought before. For example, they might go to school in small towns or rural areas with heavy academic pressures, and there are no overnight parties several days a week as they expected. At the same time, as they experience a new and unknown cultural atmosphere and experience communication gaps caused by insufficient English language proficiency which may cause Chinese international students to feel overwhelmed and lost. Many students experience severe anxiety and frustration (p. 107). To ease their frustration and anxiety, many Chinese international students prefer to stay within Chinese groups. Many Chinese international students
isolate themselves from both American culture and opportunities to use the English language in communication with others, which makes adapting to American culture more and more difficult (p. 107).

Students from China are often brought up in a traditionally collectivistic culture which emphasizes the unity and identity of social groups over an individual’s uniqueness and choices. In addition, under the influence of traditional educational philosophy and exam-oriented teaching ideology, Chinese people believe that teachers are absolute authorities (Xiao, 2016). Because of the impact of Chinese culture, teachings in China focused on students maintaining a respectful and attentive silence in Chinese classrooms, and teachers seldom encourage students to be critical thinkers expressing doubt about textbooks or announcing new ideas will be considered as disrespectful to teachers (Xiao, 2016). As the result, Chinese international students may find it difficult to adjust to the academic and social differences they experience within American classrooms, such as teachers’ encouragement of active participation and discussion (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

The relationship between cultural and linguistic factors. Many Chinese students attribute their choice to isolate their social circle to the cultural gap between China and the United States (Yan, 2011). Cultural differences also make it difficult for Chinese students to understand the content of the communication, such as slang and metaphors. This social/cultural isolation is also a barrier to improving the English communication skills for Chinese international students.

At the same time, language barriers also have a strong impact on cultural confusion (Yan, 2011). The lack of appropriate language proficiency and communication skills leads to a sense of
social difficulties and isolation. As a result, Chinese international students often prefer to participate in Chinese student groups (Yan, 2011). In the end, participating only in Chinese social circles creates more distance between Chinese students and American culture. Yan (2011) also claimed that the linguistic and cultural isolation has significant negative impacts on Chinese international students’ cultural adaptation and linguistic improvement in the United States.

**Achievement and success in adaptation.** Tan (2013) claimed that although Chinese international students will most likely experience a period of uncomfortable, even often painful feelings and experiences in their initial adaptation to the U.S., their independent thinking ability and self-determination skills will improve as a result of successful integration into their new surroundings and culture (p. 80). Chinese international students can learn a lot during their study in the U.S., not only related to academic knowledge, but also with regard to social skills, English proficiency, cultural awareness, social justice ideas, diversity awareness, and other aspects. By taking initiative and making independent decisions for their life and their studies, Chinese students can gain a new understanding of self-efficacy, metacognition and self-assessment.

During their study abroad in the U.S., Chinese international students learn to refuse to blindly believe in the views of authorities, but also become willing to maintain a reasonable critical attitude in their academic process. In daily life, Chinese international students become more confident, mature, and assertive, and their self-awareness and self-confidence are also improved (Tan, 2013). Thus, as previously mentioned, Chinese international students have opportunities to gain both academic and personal growth during their adaptation to and within U.S. universities, as they become more independent, confident, strong, and mature (Tan, 2013).
University-based support in the United States. With the implementation of educational globalization, the proportion of Chinese international students on U.S. university campuses has gradually increased. In order to attract more Chinese students, educational institutions in the U.S. are actively concerned about the needs of international students in their study and daily life and desire to uncover the difficulties students encounter during academic and cultural adaptation, so as to provide better student services (Zhu, 2008, p. 12).

Roles of University Support. Because international students usually have an insufficient understanding about the host country in academic, social, cultural, and linguistic aspects, the university’s support for international students has great significance to the academic and social success of international students (Cho & Yu, 2014, p. 12). At the same time, international students also rely heavily on hosting universities in various ways. Therefore, the hosting universities are the most important source for international students to gain support, and university support plays an important role in improving international students’ lives in the host institution and society (Cho & Yu, 2014).

In addition, Yeh and Inose (2003) suggests that Chinese international students in the United States tend to experience high levels of adjustment difficulties, most likely because of the vast differences in social and cultural norms. Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, and Kumar (2014) also indicated that the students experienced differences between their pre and post sojourn perceptions of the United States, encountered various forms of acculturative stress, and sought support from multiple sources (p. 107).

International students themselves and the U.S. universities need to work together in order to improve intercultural communication skills of international students. Students should study...
It is both necessary and urgent to provide Chinese students with academic support, as it can lead to improved student retention and gains in student academic success during the academic program. Improved academic support in United States universities has played a significant role in promoting student success, has improved university talent training and quality assurance of higher education, and has accelerated the integration of academic affairs and student affairs in American universities (Zhang, 2013, p. 49).

Zhang (2013) points out that academic support should help students according to their own characteristics and needs to improve their cognitive development, and encourage students to use a variety of services and resources to determine the needs of students to ensure their academic success (p. 21). Zhang (2013) also argues that academic support is beneficial to both the university and the students. The goal of academic support is to be consistent with the university's educational goals, and to set the academic support objectives according to differences of student groups in order to promote the development of students according to their own personality and needs (p. 16).

Han (2009) concludes that academic support in the United States operates as a service for all level students. Academic support activities for students include academic guidance, employment guidance, counseling, computer services, library services, supplementary teaching, student learning promotion services, test services, and study counseling. Special groups of
students that might need specialized services include athletes, non-resident students, students with disabilities, students with learning disabilities, minority students, online courses, adult students, and veterans (p. 11).

In addition, Zhang (2013) claimed that students often feel confused and helpless, lacking self-confidence in their learning processes. In addition, many students are also struggling under everyday living and psychological stress. During the adaptation to a new campus, the pressure of new surroundings is prominent, which may reduce the enthusiasm of students to take the initiative to learn. For these reasons, providing academic support to students not only can boost students’ academic success in higher education, but also support their psychological well-being (p. 2).

Linguistic support. In order to support international Chinese students, many U.S. universities establish English language training courses to provide English language support for international students and help them adapt to English and the demands of the American classroom as soon as possible.

Pathirage, Morrow, Walpitage, and Skolits (2014) point out that non-native English-speaking international students encounter diverse challenges due to language barriers while studying in the United States of America. Universities are committed to assist international students to overcome these challenges by offering a variety of support services including ESL courses. Most of these ESL courses are academically oriented, and ESL courses are very helpful in improving students’ academic language skills and social language skills (p. 25).

Unlike English teaching methods in China, ESL courses held by American universities rarely require students to do the intensive reading, nor do they include a lot of grammar study.
The main goal of ESL courses is to improve students’ reading comprehension skills and English language communication skills (Chang, 1991). Chang believes that there are three main advantages of ESL teaching in the U.S.: Communication skills teaching takes precedence over literature teaching; the combination of teaching English language and American cultural knowledge simultaneously; and the instructors’ freedom to choose appropriate teaching materials and testing content (p. 51).

Pathirage, Morrow, Walpitage, and Skolits (2014) also claimed that “ESL teachers also regularly make several decisions about the teaching-learning process, such as what the ESL curriculum should include, what activities are effective, and what activities the students might enjoy in the classroom. However, the learners' perceptions are not often considered in these decision-making processes” (p. 32). Thus, taking into account students’ practical knowledge of ESL courses and their suggestions for improving the curriculum, the university can improve the quality of ESL courses in order to ensure the linguistic support services are entirely beneficial to international students in American academic life.

**Cultural support.** Chavajay (2013) argued that the cultural adjustments that the participating international students experienced in the host culture appear to have been shaped by the perceived socioemotional and instrumental support they obtained from others, especially the support from other international students living in the host culture, as well as family members and friends living abroad (p. 674).

Major (2005) also points out that evidence is growing which “indicates the need for culturally specific support for non-native English speaking students and Asian students, in particular, attending higher education institutions in English-speaking countries” (p. 91). For
examples, university supported on campus celebrations of Chinese traditional festivals such as the Lunar New Year or Mid-Autumn festival can be very beneficial to Chinese international learners. This kind of cultural support can not only help Chinese international learners to ease homesickness, but also make them realize the whole university community respect and value their cultural background.

**American universities lack auxiliary mechanisms to support Chinese students.** The indicators that measure the quality of higher education are often related to school reputation, resources, student choice, and university research ability. However, if the fundamental goal of education is to promote student learning and development, unfortunately the efficiency of university support toward its students is often overlooked by institutions (Harvey & Green, 1993). While focusing on academic research and university development, U.S. universities should pay more attention to providing assistance and support to students from all over the world.

A large number of Chinese international students study abroad every single year, and bring vast financial resources and cultural diversity to universities in the United States. However, although universities in the United States has always been known as “student-centered” and “inclusive”, American universities often lack the appropriate counseling and support systems for Chinese international students (Yang & Chen, 2016, p. 57). Yang and Chen (2016) reported that many American universities tend to assume that international students already have the ability to become familiar with the new environment before they come to the U.S. In making these assumptions, the universities may overlook the Chinese international students' insufficient English language skills, and different cultural backgrounds (p. 57).
Summary of literature review. Generally speaking, research on the adaptation of Chinese international students in American universities is a very comprehensive subject, which can be carried out through a variety of research perspectives and research methods. The combining of the existing literature gives light to the difficulties, needs, and shortcomings during the adaptation of Chinese international in American universities.

Findings from this body of research can help educators to better understand Chinese students in institutions of higher education in the United States, and can also help Chinese students to increase academic success and adapt to cultural activities in the American universities. After Chinese students leave their homeland and arrive at American universities, “Many overseas students attempting to study in a higher education setting face obstacles such as financing their education, balancing work and study schedules, finding the self-discipline to persist, and many other obstacles that can make attending college a difficult task” (Bista & Foster, 2011). The main challenges many Chinese students seem to face during their adaptation in the U.S. universities are cultural and academic difficulties, and limited English language proficiency. Yang and Chen (2016) also discusses that lack of language skills, cross-cultural barriers, and lack of support mechanisms are three major challenges facing Chinese students in the United States (p. 54).

Often, the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in the United States is particularly difficult (Yan, 2011, p. 100), as China and the United States are very different in terms of language, culture, social structure, and political ideology, and China has been isolated from the world due to political reasons from 1950s to 1980s. Before leaving their homeland, Chinese students often lack of the sufficient knowledge of the destination country’s culture, law,
religion. When Chinese students suddenly face the cultural differences between the Eastern and the Western societies, they often don’t have enough mental preparation, which can cause frustration and anxiety (Liang, 2013, p. 30). In addition, Liang (2013) discussed a unique perspective that the current generation of Chinese international students are born under the impact of one-child policy, which means they normally have no siblings, and might be spoiled by the whole family, so that they have lower adaptability skills than students with siblings. When they leave the family to study in the United States by themselves, families may only be able to continue to support their students financially but cannot give their children direct psychological comfort and support. This may increase international students’ anxiety and depression (p. 31).

Moreover, according to Liang’s study of Chinese international students, English language proficiency is one of the main barriers for Chinese students in learning (Liang, 2013, p. 21). Due to the language barrier, Chinese students feel anxious and overwhelmed in both academic process and cultural activities. Also, the involvement of American culture and religious infiltration rarely occurs among Chinese students; for example, many Chinese students do not celebrate Thanksgiving, they seldom eat turkeys, possibly never watch NFL games, and never experience racial diversity.

Although many Chinese students want to integrate into the local social and cultural life, most students find it to be difficult (Wang, 2013, p. 9). In the United States, Chinese students are mostly still living in Chinese social, language and cultural complexes. Many of the Chinese students live in a "Chinese community" created by themselves (Wang, 2013, p. 3). The combination of language barriers and lack of understanding of American society can lead to the
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deep social isolation of Chinese international students. Also, Wang (2013) argues that it is very hard for Chinese students to adapt well to the new cultural environment during the limited time they are in the United States to study. Some Chinese international students reported that their academic program was almost finished when they were just able to get used to the cultural differences (p. 46).

Lastly, universities in the United States often have insufficient support systems and planned processes of integration for Chinese international students. The existing relevant research shows that not all international students can successfully complete the process of studying abroad and be successful in cross-cultural adaptation. Although the population involved is only a small proportion of the total international students, it is often overlooked by universities and relevant educational agencies (Wang, 2013, p. 2).

Therefore, in light of prior research, in order to determine the current situation of Chinese international learners at University A and investigate their perceptions of needed supports in academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects, the research questions guiding this dissertation were:

1. What are the academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges Chinese students face in studying at A University in the United States?
2. How are these challenges formed and why?
3. What are the perspectives of university administrator/faculty toward Chinese students?
4. How can universities and educators effectively support Chinese international students in relation to these challenges (universities and educators both in China and in the U.S.)?

The following chapter provides a description of the research paradigm and methods used to generate data in relation to these research questions.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents a detailed description of the research design, setting, and research methodology used to address the research questions. As described in the first two chapters, the goal of this research study was to uncover participants’ attitudes regarding the current status and challenges Chinese students face during their time studying in a U.S. university, through both perspectives and behaviors of current Chinese international students, and experiences of relevant faculty and administrators from a particular, small, liberal arts, international-focused school in the mid-Atlantic region of United States: University A.

To achieve this goal, current international Chinese students (both undergraduate and graduate), faculty members teaching courses with Chinese international students enrolled, and administrators of University A whose work involves responsibilities related to Chinese international students were invited to participate in this study, the researcher desired to capture the participant perceptions about Chinese students' status and challenges in academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects of their education at University A and frame perspectives and suggestions for further support. Methods used for data collection included individual interviews with the participants. At the same time, the researcher also observed both academic courses and social activities held by the University A, in order to observe how Chinese international students act and interact with American professors and peers.

Introduction and Research Questions. As more and more Chinese students come to the United States for further study, the ability of Chinese students to adapt the academic, linguistic, and cultural demands of studying in the United States becomes more and more obvious. Due to the differences in history, language, culture, and social environment between
China and the United States, many Chinese students are facing adaptive challenges in the United States. With the increasing number of Chinese international students, there is both academic and practical significance in understanding how Chinese international students can overcome the academic, linguistic, and cultural differences during their learning and living in the U.S.

The purpose of the research was to explore and understand the current experience and status, as well as academic, linguistic, and cultural obstacles that Chinese students face during their tenure in the United States as well as their perspectives and suggestions for university support. At the same time, this research also collected data about Chinese international students’ behavior with American professors and peers by observing the involvement of Chinese students in academic courses and university held activities.

In addition, the researcher also performed document analysis in order to discover the goals and university level supports of academic partnership, and triangulated the finding of this research by analyzing the partnership agreement document between the University A and JS University related with the acculturation theoretical framework.

The ultimate goal of the research was to provide guidance for Chinese students’ adaptation in American colleges, and provide practical suggestions for higher education institutes and educational agencies in both China and the U.S. to support Chinese international students.

During the participant interviews, the research questions for Chinese students were mainly focused on the status and challenges they face during their time studying in the U.S. and how might educational organizations support Chinese international learners to adapt to the culture, language, and academic demands of an American university campus. The research
questions for faculty members and administrators mainly focused on their working experiences and perspectives with Chinese international students at the University A, and their suggestions for Chinese students and university-level support.

During the observations, the research was mainly focused on how Chinese international students behave during academic courses and social activities, such as their sitting patterns where the students choose to sit in a classroom, their language used during discussion, their communication with Americans, their behave during presentations.

**Research type.** The study abroad experience and living conditions of Chinese international students in the United States have drawn wide attention from international scholars, relevant institutions, students’ parents, and those who intend to study abroad (Lin, 2017). In order to best capture the reality of Chinese international students’ situations and perspectives on these challenges, a qualitative case study methodology, delivered by individual interviews and observations, was used to seek answers to the research question.

**The perspective of the research.** In this study, the research was conducted with Chinese international students, faculty members, and administrators at University A, which served as the research context. The research used case study as a format, as the “closed system” of this one particular university provides the bounded context for the case. The researcher conducted face to face interviews with participants with both close and open-ended questions, and the researcher also collected data from observations of both academic courses and social activities, as well as the document analysis of the partnership agreement between the University A and JS University.

In order to ensure the highest quality of research data, the interviews with Chinese native speakers were delivered in participants’ native language (Chinese Mandarin) to minimize
any misunderstanding or confusion caused by participants’ English language proficiency; at the same time, the interviews with English speaking faculty members and administrators of University A were delivered in English.

Moreover, as a Chinese international student, the researcher has common ground and a similar cultural background with Chinese interviewees, which can ensure better communication between the author and the interviewees, in order to improve data accuracy.

**Research lens.** A qualitative, phenomenological case study was designed to discover international Chinese students' and faculty who taught Chinese international students viewpoint and suggestions. Methods used for data collection included individual interviews and observations with the participants. The researcher interviewed participants individually with both open-ended and closed-ended questions in order to learn about their attitudes and suggestions. The researcher also observed both academic courses and social activities held by the University A, to observe how Chinese international students communicate and interact with American professors and peers.

**Context of the study.** University A actively engages in international education and aims to enhance students’ global perspectives with the ambition of building an international focused higher education institute. University A maintains a strong academic partner in China, the JS University.

University A has a strong academic partnership with JS University, the most successful academic collaboration between University A and JS University being the Mathematics and Applied Mathematics Undergraduate Joint Education program.
The Mathematics and Applied Mathematics Undergraduate Joint Education program is an international program which was established in September 2011. Students who complete three years at JS University and one year at University A are qualified to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics from both institutions (University A’s document, 2012).

The partnership between University A and JS University also received positive feedback in China, through a popular local newspaper. The article highlighted the successful collaboration of the Mathematics course between University A and JS University and how Chinese students are preparing for the start of the school year. The Chinese students are required to make preparations before the start of the new semester, which includes conversing with their parents, reading English texts aloud, and writing a journal in English (University A’s document, 2017).

**Description of site.** The site of this research based on the campus of University A, a comprehensive, private university located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The university has a co-educational student population of approximately 4,000 (both undergraduate and graduate level). University A has also been actively engaged in international education for many years and the population of international students is approximately 40 (both undergraduate and graduate level).

**The office of international affairs (OIA).** The office of international affairs at University A, “Provide campus-wide outreach on global initiatives, guidance to Glenside students in their global education, central advisory services to international scholars and students, and administrative support to joint programs and partnerships. Our mission is to support the creation and management of global initiatives based at University A’s main campus” (University A’s document, 2017).
The office of international affairs has IPALs specialize in providing support to both international students and scholars. The document states, “IPALs are the International Peer Associates League members who work with international students at University A. IPALs’ job is to help integrate these students in our American campus. We do everything from picking students up from the airport, teaching them how to use public transportation, checking in on how their classes are, and introducing them to campus life” (University A’s document, 2017).

**English language training program.** The English language training program at University A aims to help international students adapt to the English learning environment as soon as possible and build the language foundation for entering the university.

University A requires international students to have a fluent English level. The international student who enroll are required to have a TOEFL internet test score of no less than 80. For those who do not meet the language requirements, students can enter the English language training program for English training, and after finishing all ELC courses, students can study in academic programs at University A. ELI usually offers different levels of courses from level 95 to level 100, and the difficulty of the courses will be gradually increased. The courses mainly include four aspects: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The English language training program prepares non-native English speaking students to continue their education and professional development at University A or elsewhere. Through language instruction, intercultural experiences, and academic support, the Institute provides students with the foundation for successful academic careers and full participation in a global society (University A’s document, 2017).
The intensive English program consists of six levels of language proficiency: Beginning I, Beginning II, Intermediate I, Intermediate II, Intermediate III, and Advanced. Advanced-level students may be eligible to take graduate or undergraduate courses at University A with language support and may pay for the courses at the credit-hour rate. If accepted as part of conditional admissions, students then take the in-house language test at the successful conclusion of ELC coursework in order to potentially qualify for full-time university study (University A’s document, 2017).

In addition, the English language training program at the University A recruits volunteers for its conversation partners program, which pairs non-native and native English speaking students to learn and practice English through informal conversation. Partners establish a meeting time, place, and frequency, ideally meeting at least once a week for 30-45 minutes. Through relaxed conversation about family, friends, school, and life, partners share cultural experiences while providing a forum for nonnative speakers to practice English (University A’s document, 2017).

Participants. The researcher invited Chinese students currently studying abroad at University A, as well as educators and administrators supporting the linguistic needs of Chinese students at the English language training program at University A, to participate in individual interviews (See interview questions, Appendix A). These participants were invited through the qualitative method of purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013), through which participants were invited because of their unique perspectives and insights into the phenomenon being studied.

As part of the case study, these participants were all involved in the naturally-occurring environment (Creswell, 2013) of University A, and are all working toward effective
China-University A partnerships and successful Chinese student experiences and academic outcomes. The total number of invited participants for interviews were twenty, and five observations were completed.

**Participant inclusion criteria.** Invited Chinese students were required to be full-time international students at University A and native in Chinese Mandarin. They needed to have experienced at least secondary-level education in China. The majority of participants included Math, Actuarial Science, and Business majors, as these were the programs which enroll the majority of Chinese international students at the university. The gender of participants were both male and female, and their ages ranged between 20 and 26 years old. The total population of Chinese students who agreed to participate was 9, and their majors included Math, Actuarial Science, Fine Arts, and Business.

In addition, student participants were invited to participate in the study if they were in their first, and/or up to their fifth year of study abroad at this university.

At the same time, invited faculty members and administrators were required to be full-time employees at the University A, and had direct teaching or working experience with Chinese students within the last 3 years.

The demographic information of participants in this research is shown by the following table:

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<td>Student</td>
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In order to have a better understanding about Chinese international students’ current status and challenges during their time studying at the University A, this research included Chinese students, faculty members, and administrators at University A. The focus of individual interviews included the following aspects:

1. What kinds of preparation did Chinese international students make before they came to study in the U.S.?

2. What are the feelings Chinese students have during their time studying in the U.S.?
3. What kinds of academic/linguistic/cultural challenges did Chinese international students faced during their study in the U.S.?

4. What kinds of support did Chinese international students receive from both domestic and American universities?

5. What kinds of suggestions or requirements Chinese international students would like to deliver to both domestic and American universities?

6. What are the perspectives that faculty members and administrators have toward Chinese students?

7. What are the suggestions and advises that faculty members and administrators have for Chinese international students and university level support?

At the same time, the focus of observations included the following aspects:

1. What are the group pattern of Chinese students? (Do they prefer to stay with other Chinese students or American in class/ during activities?)

2. What are the range of behaviors of Chinese students during discussion or communication during class/activities? Which language do they use?

3. What are the range of ways that Chinese students solve academic problems? (Such as answering questions, tests, and quizzes.)

4. What are the range of ways that Chinese students collaborate with other classmates? (Including teamwork and presentations)

**Role of the researcher.** The researcher is an international student who came from China, and has the same linguistic and cultural background as most other Chinese international
students. Second, the researcher has studied at University A’s School of Education since 2014, and also studied at the English language training program at University A during his first semester, so the researcher has his own learning experience studying as a Chinese international student at this university. Third, the researcher has been working frequently with international students, instructors, and administrators since 2015 on different research topics, so the researcher has developed relationships of collegial rapport with the potential participants.

As an English language learner, the researcher had experience of English language training in China for over 15 years, and after coming to the U.S. to engage in higher education, the researcher noticed gaps between English language training in China and English proficiency requirements in the U.S.. It was found that presentation and discussion are very important in the U.S. classroom, but in China, English language training mainly focuses on grammar, reading, and writing.

The researcher has also been communicating with many Chinese international students at University A, who have similar ideas about the differences between China and the United States in the instruction of English. Many Chinese students need language training because English language training can help them adapt to the U.S. classroom in both academic and social aspects.

The researcher’s own learning experience in the U.S. also shapes the approach to the project, as he has also experienced challenges typical of other Chinese international students in terms of academic programs, English language proficiency, and cultural adaptation. Chinese international students need support provided by the university, because of the gaps existing between the needs of Chinese students and support from the University.
The findings from this study may benefit both Chinese students and the University A. On the one hand, the findings helped educators at University A to understand their Chinese students’ needs. On the other hand, the findings also helped Chinese students understand their cultural, linguistic, and academic support needs as a component of their academic performance and the need for English proficiency in future learning and career development.

In order to maintain trustworthiness and credibility of the data collection and analysis processes, the researcher was committed to following the tenets of qualitative case study research in participant selection and implementation of the research methods.

**Data Generation.** This qualitative case study investigation included data generation from individual student and educator interviews, document analysis, and observations of daily courses and university-held activities.

**Interviews.** Individual interviews were used to gather participants’ perspectives relative to the research questions. Each interview was approximately 40 to 60 minutes. The total number of invited participants were 20, including students, faculty members, and university administrators.

With the site and participants in place, the researcher arranged the schedule of interviews with participants individually. The researcher initially asked the participant if he/she would like to participate in the interview, and researcher informed Chinese participants that interview was going to be delivered in Chinese Mandarin to eliminate any potential misunderstanding caused by participants’ lack of English proficiency and ensure data accuracy.

The sites for the face to face interviews with Chinese students were located at the study room at the university’s library or at the apartment building. The study room was isolated by the
metal door, and all the interviews were performed in empty rooms without other students’
disruptions. The reason to choose isolated rooms was to maintain the quiet, disruption-free
surroundings to create a safe and comfortable communication environment for interviewees. The
site for the interviews with faculty members or administrators were located at their own personal
offices, for both convenience and security concerns.

The interview questions were created by the researcher, with the goal of questions being
to provide participants an opportunity to share their own experience and perspectives. The
interview questions with Chinese students were designed in five foundational aspects:

First, the self-introduction and general feeling about study in the U.S., including
participants’ age, gender, academic major, the time length of studying in the U.S., housing status,
and other information they wished to share;

Second, the differences between China and the U.S. in academic aspects, including both
advantages and challenges, the academic program connection between China and the U.S., and
the participant’s experience of academic progress in the U.S.

Third, the differences between China and the U.S. in linguistic aspects, including
English learning methods, English proficiency, assessment, communication skills, academic
language skills, and the reason why English language proficiency becomes a challenge for
Chinese international students, plus the participant’s experience of learning and using English.

Fourth, the different experiences of living in China and the U.S., including culture
shock, cultural events, how cultural differences influence Chinese students’ adaptation, and
participant’s experience of different cultures.
Fifth, what kind of the supports are provided to Chinese students by the university, which part of university support has positive impact on Chinese students’ adaptation, participant’s experience of university support, and what suggestions do Chinese international students want to provide.

The interview questions with faculty members and administrators were designed in four foundational aspects: First, the self-introduction and professional duty. Second, working experience with Chinese students. Third, perspectives toward Chinese students. Fourth, suggestions about how to support Chinese students.

During interviews, the researcher audiotaped and took notes. During each interview, for Chinese participants, the researcher conducted the interviews in Mandarin, and transcribed them into English. In the dissertation, the responses were presented in Mandarin and translations of those sections were translated into English. Afterward the interviews, the researcher began to analyze the data through coding, looking for similarities, differences, and themes across participants’ demographic information, interview notes, and audio to triangulate the barriers and difficulties Chinese international students facing during adaptation into an American university campus (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Observations. The researcher scheduled five observations, including both daily courses and university-held activities, in order to document the Chinese international students’ behavior and reactions with professors, classmates, and American peers during their time studying at the University A.
During observations, the researcher sat in the back of classrooms or other activities sites, took notes quietly and avoided any types of communications with professors, Chinese international students, American students, or other personnel.

**Document Analysis.** In addition, during the data generation stage, the researcher also collected written documents containing information about the international academic partnership between the University A and JS University. The researcher asked for a copy of any documents, and communicated with university personnel in order to uncover the agreed-upon objectives for Chinese international students study abroad in the U.S. In addition, the researcher investigated the preparations and supports students received in both the JS University in China and the University A in the U.S., in order to find information related to acculturation and university level support.

The researcher reviewed the agreement document of academic partnership between the University A and JS University, by applying the access of review the contract and collecting key information from professionals at the Office of International Affairs of the University A.

The researcher took notes on the document or the conversation during information discussions with professionals at University A. After the data was collected, the researcher went through the data and found the purpose of the academic partnership, the agreements made between the two universities, and the support and assistance to the Chinese students.

Moreover, the researcher also used pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of document or information, and replaced all identifying information of both sites. All the data and agreement document were saved in the researcher’s password protected personal computer, and the data was only shared with the faculty supervisor of this project at the University A.
Data Analysis. Next, the researcher combined the interviews, documents, and observational data, using both transcripts and field notes. The investigator developed initial common themes and codes between all data sources by finding keywords and similar perspectives; afterward, the researcher developed a deeper understanding of common themes emerging from all involved data sources and the researcher classified data according to different scopes in order to find the commonality and contradictions of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Trustworthiness and Credibility. In order to strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of the data collection and study findings, the researcher utilized participant confidentiality, member checking, peer debriefing, reflective journaling, and an audit trail of communication and research activities (Creswell, 2013). The research was carefully designed and performed in order to reduce any ethical risks. First, participants’ personal information was not recorded in any version, and all participants’ names were replaced by pseudonyms. Second, the interviews and observations were delivered in the closed environment, without external interference, and the notes were recorded using pseudonyms for confidentiality. Third, the original notes and audio of the interviews and observations were shared with researcher’s faculty supervisor.

Participant Confidentiality. It was very important to safeguard participant confidentiality. In addition to the consent form, during the interview the interviewees were told that the interview will be recorded, and the interviewees had the right to stop participating at any time; moreover, professors or activities providers also had the right to cancel the observations during the observation at any points.
In order to maintain these precautions throughout the study process, the researcher recorded the audio of interviews and wrote notes from both interviews and observations, without using any of the participant’s identifying information. Additionally, after each interview and observation, the researcher organized the findings, replaced any identifying information with pseudonyms, saved the paper-based document in a locked suitcase, and saved the audio recordings on a personal, password-protected computer.

In addition, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, it was imperative for participants to trust the researcher to guard their identity. During interviews, observations, and subsequent writings, the researcher used pseudonyms to ensure the participants’ confidentiality. The researcher also provided summaries of the major ideas from the transcripts to the participants for checking, giving participants an opportunity to add, correct, or omit information as they wished to ensure the information was recorded as they intended. This was known in qualitative research as member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

**Peer debriefing.** Once the interviews and observations were done, the researcher invited a colleague from the doctoral cohort who was familiar with and had experience with Chinese students to review the data. The impartial peer examined the researcher’s transcripts, data analysis, and general methodology. Afterward, feedback was provided to enhance credibility and research quality.

**Reflexive journaling.** As a Chinese international student at the University A, the researcher maintained equal and respectful relationships with all participants regardless of their gender, academic level, and personal background during the research phase. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data collection, analysis, and findings, the researcher maintained an
ongoing reflexive journal in relation to uncovering and documenting any researcher perspectives which may be influencing the analysis. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), reflexive journaling “is for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases. This is the process whereby researchers report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry. It is particularly important for researchers to acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions, and then to bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds” (p. 127).

**Audit trail.** After received the permission of the IRB, the researcher started to schedule interviews and observations between November 2018 to December 2018. After the data collection, the researcher started coding and analyzing data between December 2018 to January 2019. All data were saved in different folders chronologically in the researcher’s password-protected computer or locked files.

**Limitations.** Due to the time span and policy concern, there were two main limitations to this study. The first limitation of this research was the limited sample selecting: this research was only based on University A, which means the research results were mainly applied to students, faculty members, and administrators at University A. Secondly, the participating students had limited diversity; most of the Chinese students had came from the University A’s China-America partnership programs. as a result, the participants had low diversity in major, age, and cultural background, which made the results less generalizable.

**Ethical Considerations.** The research was carefully designed and performed in order to reduce any ethical risks. First, participants’ personal information was not recorded in any version, and all participants’ names were replaced by pseudonyms. Second, the interviews and
observations were delivered in the closed environment, without external interference, and the notes were recorded with confidentiality as well. Third, the original notes and audio of the interviews and observations were not shared with others except the researcher's academic supervisor.

The conclusion. In order to discover and analyze the current status and challenges Chinese students face during their time studying at a U.S. university, through both perspectives and behaviors of current Chinese international students, and experiences of faculty and administrator from the University A, the researcher performed interviews, observations, and document review. The coding and analyzing of the data collected from the research is shown in Chapter 4, data analysis and findings.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover and analyze the current status and challenges Chinese students face during their time studying at a U.S. university, through both perspectives and behaviors of current Chinese international students and experiences of faculty members and administrators from a particular, small, liberal arts, international-focused school in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States: University A.

In order to discover and understand the current status and challenges Chinese students have during their study abroad in the U.S., the research questions of this study were designed in four aspects:

1. What are the academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges Chinese students face in studying at University A in the United States?

2. How are these challenges formed and why?

3. What are the perspectives of university administrator/faculty toward Chinese students?

4. How can universities and educators effectively support Chinese international students in relation to these challenges (universities and educators both in China and in the U.S.)?

The researcher utilized one on one interviews with Chinese international students, faculty members, and administrators of University A, reviewed documents concerning international relationships, and observed classes and activities where Chinese students were present. The purpose was to determine the attitudes and perceptions of Chinese international
students and the challenges they faced in an American university and provide suggestions to educators for effective support of Chinese international students. By using the qualitative method of triangulation, the researcher captured a full context of Chinese international students’ current status and challenges, and uncovered the perspectives and opinions of faculty members and administrators, an ascertained suggestions for university support mentioned by both Chinese internationals and educators at University A.

During the spring 2019 semester, the researcher collected data from the main campus of University A. It is a small, liberal arts, international-focused educational institution with approximately 4,000 graduate and undergraduate total students, including approximately 40 Chinese international students.

**Participants**

Chinese international students, faculty teaching Chinese international students, and university administrators working with Chinese international students at University A were invited to participate in this study.

**Student demographic profile data.** For the purposes of this study, the researcher obtained Chinese students’ general information from the Office of International Affairs at University A. The information included the student's gender, major field of study, level of the study, and so on. This information provided the researcher with the general information of Chinese international students and with a demographic overview of the Chinese international students' population at University A.

According to the data collected from the Office of International Affairs at University A, in the Spring 2019 semester, there was one Chinese international student studying in the English
Language program, seven students studying at the graduate school level, and 32 students studying at the undergraduate level. All of the Chinese international students were Chinese citizens with English as their foreign language. In addition, the Chinese international students had a wide variety of major fields of study ranging from Education (4), Master’s in Business Administration (MBA) (3), Actuarial Science (20), Mathematics (9), Media Communication (1), Biology (1), and Fine Arts (1). Only one student who studied in the English language program was undecided about a major due to insufficient English language proficiency. The majority of the Chinese international students at University A were in the undergraduate level with an Actuarial Science major. Of these students, nine agreed to participate in the study; the participating students are referred to as: Ross, Joey, Rachel, Phoebe, Judy, Howard, Chandler, Monica, and Jack.

**Faculty and Administrator Participants.** The researcher recruited six faculty members and three administrators from University A. The faculty members were those teaching in Math, Actuarial Science, and Business majors, and all of the faculty participants had multiple semesters of experience teaching Chinese international students. Their classes typically have enrollments of 15 to 25 students, including 5 to 15 Chinese students. The administrator participants in this research also had working experience with Chinese international students at the University A and one of them had been working with Chinese international students for more than 15 years. For confidentiality purposes, the participating faculty are referred to as: Ben, Richard, Gunther, Susan, Susie, Janice, and administrators as: Emily, Carol, and Emma.

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**Methods**

The researcher collected data in response to the research questions through individual interviews, observations, and document review.
Interview data. During the spring semester of 2019, the researcher recruited Chinese international students, faculty members, and university administrators at University A to participate in individual interviews using both closed and open-ended questions. Interview questions were designed to investigate the participant perspectives, experiences, and suggestions in relation to the research questions. Eighteen participants were invited, including nine Chinese international students, six faculty members, as well as three administrators. The interviews with Chinese native speakers, including one faculty member and nine Chinese students, were delivered by the researcher in Chinese Mandarin, in order to minimize any misunderstanding or confusion caused by participants’ English language proficiency. All other interviews were delivered by the researcher in English. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and translated to English by the researcher when appropriate. The researcher’s translations of data between Chinese and English was confirmed as accurate by a colleague in the same doctoral cohort as the researcher who is proficient in both Chinese and English languages.

The researcher created two types of interview questions; the first type of interview questions were designed for Chinese international students in order to understand their experiences, feelings, challenges, and suggestions. The second type of interview questions was designed for faculty members and administrators in order to investigate their perspectives toward Chinese international students and their suggestions in relation to the research questions (See Appendix A for Interview Questions).

Observation data. During the spring semester of 2019, the researcher observed five activities, including three sections of undergraduate level Actuarial Science courses, one section
Running Head: CHINESE INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS’ ACCULTURATION AT AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

of MBA course, and one Chinese spring festival celebration event held by the university. During the in-class observation, the researcher was observing Chinese international students’ learning behavior and interaction with others, as well as their communication with professors or other classmates. The researcher did not interact with any professors or students during the class observation. During the Chinese festival celebration event, the researcher was also a participant of the event and was involved in the celebration activity. The researcher was observing the behavior of Chinese international students during the event, and paid extra attention to their communication with American peers.

The data generated from the observations, which indicated that the majority of Chinese international students tended to sit with other Chinese students during their classes and only interacted in Chinese language with their Chinese peers, during class discussions or during class lectures or activities. Particularly during interactive class activities, Chinese students tended to stay together as a group, and although they were mixed with American students during an event, most of them still only spoke Chinese with their peers and did not willingly interact in English with the American students.

**Document review data.** For additional data, the researcher applied to the Office of International Affairs for the partnership document to review. The partnership document was a three-page long Memo of Understanding between the University A and JS University in China, which focused on the educational joint partnership in the undergraduate level of students in Actuarial Science and Math majors. The researcher also collected data about the English training program and IPAL program from the website of University A. Moreover, the researcher also obtained an eight-page long, “Frequently Asked Questions for future Chinese international
students” document from one faculty participant. At the same time, the researcher also reviewed the official webpage of JS University as a supplementary data resource to analyze if there was any information within and across these documents that described adaptation processes and the student perspective of study abroad.

The documents collected provided the general information about the educational partnership cooperation between University A and the JS University, and also provided supplementary research data about the current situation and the university’s effort in helping Chinese international students, in both University A in the U.S. and the JS University in China.

University A has a strong academic partnership with JS University for the academic programs of Actuarial Science and Math. The majority of the Chinese international students at University A are from JS University’s programs in China. The researcher analyzed the formal partnership agreement between the two Universities to uncover any academic, linguistic, or social/cultural conditions related to the agreement in relation to the students’ experiences and training at JS University in China, prior to study at University A, as well as any conditions of learning and support that University A would commit to in relation to their study abroad experiences at the University.

**The partnership between University A and JS University.** According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University with JS University, the purpose of the educational partnership cooperation between University A and the JS University are: Promote interest in teaching and research activities in institutions; Develop and offer joint degree programs and other academic programs, such as certificates, short courses and seminars; Explore and promote other knowledge and academic activities as well as mutual business
interest of both institutions; and Deepen understanding of economic, cultural and social issues and the environment of the respective institutions (University A document, 2009).

The goal of the educational partnership cooperation between University A and the JS University are: Promote institutional exchanges by inviting faculty and staff of the partner institution to participate in a variety of teaching and/or research activities and professional development; Receive undergraduate and graduate students of the partner institutions for periods of study and/or research; Organize symposia, conferences, short courses, and meetings on research issues; Carry out joint research and continuing education programs; and Exchange information pertaining to developments in teaching, student development, and research at each institution (University A’s document, 2009).

The MOU also mentioned that the cooperation between the two universities includes promoting academic collaboration at both faculty, graduate and undergraduate student levels for research and study; acting as principal contacts for individual and group activities; and planning and coordinating all activities within their institutions as well as with the partner institution; distributing to each institution information about the faculty, facilities, research, publications, library materials and educational resources of the other institution; and periodically reviewing and evaluating past activities and to work out new ideas for future cooperative agreements (University A’s document, 2009).

The official website of JS University also published that the JS University signed the educational partnership cooperation with University A in March 9th, 2011, then received the approval issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2012, and
passed the China-Foreign educational cooperation assessment in 2015 (JS University’s Webpage, 2016).

**The I-PAL program at University A.** The researcher searched on the University A’s official website and found the International Peer Associates League (I-PAL) members program. It was under the administration of the Office of International Affairs. The students in the IPAL program are trained American college students, also enrolled at University A, who help incoming international students adjust to college life at this university. I-PALS play a key role in helping the Office of International Affairs throughout the year in providing support services to students such as orientation, peer mentorship, and social and cultural programming (University A’s document, n.d.).

**The English Language Training program at University A.** The English language training program at University A prepares international students to continue their education and professional development at University A or elsewhere. Through language instruction, intercultural experiences, and academic support, the English language training program provides foreign students with the foundation for successful academic careers and full participation in a global society. Most classes have six to eight students enrolled, allowing instructors to provide the individual attention that students need to succeed in the class. Throughout the year, the English language training program offers specially designed, short-term or long-term programs that combine English language instruction with subject-matter themes, guest lectures, and possible site visits in the academic disciplines. Specifically, the program has two goals: (1) to help students develop the language and literacy skills required in graduate or undergraduate...
studies or the professions; and, (2) to socialize students into campus life and introduce them to
the broader American culture (University A’s document, n.d.).

*Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for future Chinese international students.*

According to the document, the FAQ was designed by two faculty members and one
administrator at University A, and this FAQ is specifically designed for the partnership
cooperation between University A and the JS University, in order to help future Chinese
international students learn more about the academic and social situation of University A. It also
provides detailed information about the mathematics and actuarial science majors, including
course arrangements, graduate school application, tuition, and tuition fees.

The FAQ document provided support to prospective Chinese students from the JS
University by offering information related to academics and introduction to the community. The
FAQ provided introductions to the requirements of the academic majors, explaining in detail
about actuarial science and mathematics majors such as the certificates, graduate school
application, course planning, and scholarships. The FAQ also clarified University A’s English
language proficiency requirements for undergraduate students: Score of 4.5 in iTEP\(^1\) test with
minimum 4.0 scores of each subsection; or 71 in TOEFL\(^2\) test with minimum 17 scores of each
subsection; or 6.0 in IELTS\(^3\) test with minimum 5.5 scores of each subsection. In terms of daily
living, the FAQ provided some basic information, such as safety tips, contact information for
various university offices and emergency contacts, tips in relation to Visa applications, tuition,
fees and scholarships, and housing options among other information.

\(^1\) The International Test of English Proficiency
\(^2\) The Test of English as a Foreign Language
\(^3\) The International English Language Testing System
However, there were two main shortcomings of the FAQ. First, this FAQ was only provided to Chinese international students in mathematics and actuarial science majors from JS University - other Chinese students did not have access to this FAQ. Second, this FAQ didn’t provide enough information for Chinese students about how to prepare themselves before they came to study in the U.S.

Themes

The main themes that emerged through data collection and analysis, in relation to status and challenges Chinese students face in studying at University A in the United States, included perspectives related to the academic, linguistic, and cultural expectations both prior to studying in the United States, during their time at University A, and their goals for their future after completing the study abroad experience. In the following section, the findings represent data generated from this study in relation to Chinese students’ current status and challenges at University A in academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects.

Academics. The education systems between China and the U.S. are different, therefore, as new visitors studying abroad, Chinese international students’ academic adaptation can be difficult due not only to language differences, but also in relation to differences in expectations of learning behaviors both in- and outside the classroom. However, when asked, many of the Chinese international students stated that they believed their professors are kind and helpful, and they appreciated the low faculty-student ratio.

Rachel thought that her professors at the university were knowledgeable and that they were good teachers. She stated “I think the university's learning atmosphere is very good, especially the professors are very knowledgeable and have very sufficient teaching experience.”
“我认为学校的学习氛围非常好，尤其是教授的水平很高，授课经验丰富。” ---Rachel (Student)

Ross, another Chinese international student in the same program as Rachel, also found the faculty to be well-skilled in teaching, and respectful of Chinese international students in the class. He said, “I met a professor in the English writing class. He was super nice to our Chinese international students, and he also respected every student's own country and culture. My English writing skills were very poor, but he helped me a lot in writing skills, and helped me overcome my fear of English writing. I feel very lucky to meet such a good professor.”

“我在英语写作课上遇到一个教授他对我们的中国留学生非常好，他尊重每个学生不同的国家和文化。我的英语写作能力很差，但是他对我的写作能力帮助非常大，帮助我克服了对英语写作的恐惧。我感觉非常幸运能遇上这么好的教授。”

The interview data collected from faculty members and administrators also pointed out the English language barrier of Chinese international students. Many professors highly value the unique cultural background and knowledge of Chinese students, and they also understand the difficulties and challenges for Chinese students caused by both insufficient English proficiency, as well as the fear of speaking English. One faculty member, Janice, pointed out that the information and knowledge shared by Chinese students during class can be beneficial to everyone. She said, “Letting Chinese international students talk and share their experiences can help the entire class, especially in our business major. Chinese students have so many topics and knowledge to share in discussion if they want to, however, I believe that many Chinese students have the fear that Americans aren’t going to understand themselves, I think the fear of speaking English and stepping out their comfort zone is greater than English proficiency itself.”
Prior to interviewing the participating Chinese international students, the researcher thought that the main challenge of the Chinese students’ academic adaptation would be the language demands and academic rigor of tests and assignments. However, the results indicated the opposite: Very few Chinese students participants viewed tests and assignments as the most challenging aspect of their studying at University A. Instead, they indicated that they are more concerned about interacting and participating with American peers during teamwork activities, such as presentations and interactive oral communication tasks, as well as academic writing, independent research projects, and also their future graduate school application because the graduate school application requires written personal statements and research plans in English, as well as GRE\(^4\) scores. For most of the Chinese international students need to finish the application during their senior year of college, which is very challenging in time constraints, English language use and academic aspects.

**Challenges with teamwork.** Janice, a faculty member at the university, asserted that Chinese students were often unwilling and uncomfortable in teamwork with Americans. She said, “I believe that Chinese international students are very hardworking on their own, they are really good at work individually, but they feel challenged in teamwork. Chinese students always want to teamwork with other Chinese students. I tried to mix up Chinese students with American students in team projects, but Chinese students were really outside of their comfort zone; they only focused on their own piece, and had very limited collaboration with their American teammates.”

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\(^4\) The Graduate Record Examinations
Indeed, Howard, a Chinese international student in the Actuarial Science major, found that teamwork with American peers was very challenging for him. He pointed out, “It is very difficult for me to work with the American students in teamwork and we have almost zero communication with each other. Once we had three Chinese students and one American classmate working together; the American classmate did not participate in the discussion and never replied to emails we sent to him, however, if the group had more Americans than the Chinese, it would be so difficult for me to get involved in the group discussion because I have difficulty communicating with American classmates due to my insufficient English proficiency, especially speaking skills.”

“和美国学生小组合作很有难度，而且几乎没有交流，有一次我们三个中国人和一个美国同学一起合作，结果那个美国同学根本不参与讨论，也不回复邮件，但是如果小组里美国人多于中国人，我会因为口语不好导致插不上话，很难参与到小组讨论里面去。”

Jack, another Chinese international student, also believed that although professors tried very hard to enhance the teamwork between Chinese and American students, the communication was still very challenging for Chinese students. He stated, “I think the professors are awesome and they are very willing to help Chinese international students. In the classroom, the professors will deliberately break up the small groups of Chinese students and make Chinese students team up with American classmates. However, due to lack of English communication ability, communication with American students in the classroom is still very difficult for us, especially when they say something by using slang and idioms, I can’t understand.”

“我觉得教授非常棒，他们都很乐于帮助中国留学生，在课堂上，教授会故意打破中国学生的小团体，把我们和美国人结成小组，但是由于表达能力的欠缺，课堂上和美国同学的交流依旧很困难，尤其是他们说俚语的时候我听不懂。”
Lack of interaction. Many faculty members mentioned to the researcher that Chinese international students are often not willing to participate during class; they do not share their perspectives during class discussion and they do not like to ask questions. Instead the faculty felt that most of the time, Chinese international students usually prefer to be quiet during class, sitting with and speaking only with other Chinese students. Data from both interviews and researcher observations supported these assertions about students’ behaviors.

Ben, a professor in the Math department, shared his thoughts that most of the Chinese international students can understand the academic content, but they didn’t actively participate during class. He said, “Chinese international students are not comfortable taking risks during class. I know many of my Chinese students know the answer of the question, but they still don’t want to speak out and interact with me.”

To address this lack of interaction during class, Susie, a faculty member of the Math department who had Chinese as her first language, shared that she had created opportunities for Chinese students to earn bonus credits by participating during class; however, this didn’t seem to motivate the students. She said, “Most of Chinese students in my class are very quiet and don’t want to take the initiative to participate in teaching activities, so I decided to randomly choose five students every class as my focus group, and I will create more opportunities for them to interact with me during class. They can earn extra credits as bonus if they actively interact during class. However, this method only worked for those students who were already willing to participate in teaching activities. The other students still chose to be quiet and were not willing to interact with me.”
“我班里的大多数中国学生非常安静，不愿意参加课堂活动，因此我每节课都会随机抽取五名学生，并且在课堂中给他们更多的发言机会，如果他们参与度很好可以得到额外的加分作为奖励。但是这个方法只对那些本来就积极互动的同学有效果，仍然无法改变那些平时不愿意参与互动的学生。”

The interviews with Chinese students and faculty members also indicated their perceptions that Chinese students can do excellent work with step-by-step instructions from professors; However, Chinese students often feel overwhelmed by teamwork with American peers. Some participants believed that part of the students’ challenges in these types of activities were due to underlying different educational expectations between China and the U.S. in terms of learning processes. The believed that most Chinese students have strong academic skills and are very hard-working, but they are less familiar with the U.S.-based pedagogical expectations regarding collaborative learning and giving presentations to faculty and peers.

Moreover, Chinese international students’ in-class communication opportunity can be different in academic majors. For instance, Chinese international students who study in the business major will have more chances to do presentations than students in the math major. As an example, Judy, a student, shared that “our actuarial science major seldom requires class presentation or discussion. We only need to answer some simple math questions by numbers—we don’t have many opportunities to speak English with professors or classmates during class”

“我们精算专业几乎用不到课堂展示和课堂讨论，就算是回答问题也是很简单的数字问题，用英语和教授同学开口对话的机会很少。”

Judy also mentioned that lack of training and practicing in China made her nervous giving presentations in her university courses. She said, “I strongly dislike doing presentations during class, because giving presentations always makes me feel very nervous, but I don't think this has any correlation with my English proficiency. Even if I could use Chinese to make a
presentation, I will still be nervous. I think we barely have any training or practice about how to make presentation in China, and there is almost not necessary to interact with professors during class when I was at my university in China. However, it is very important to interact with professors during class here in the US.”

“我很讨厌做课堂展示，因为我会很紧张，但我觉得这个和英语水平关系不大，就算是用中文做演示我也会紧张。我认为在国内几乎没有这方面的培训和练习，而且在国内大学上课的时候几乎不需要和教授互动，但是在美国上课和教授互动是非常重要的环节。”

However, though Janice perceived that many Chinese students lacked confidence and certain learning skills, professors should always help them and provide them more opportunities to practice. She said, “Every student in my class needs to give a presentation and lead the discussion as a requirement. This requirement made Chinese international students so panicked and uncomfortable, so I encouraged them to come to my office and practice two to three times with me before they do it in the class. As a result, they all finished the presentation.” ---Janice (Faculty)

Higher order learning. According to the data collected from Chinese international students at University A, many participants reflected that they felt comfortable completing daily academic work at University A when it involves memory or calculation. However, they believed that course content which involves theoretical knowledge, higher academic requirements, and higher order learning skills are much more challenging.

Phoebe specifically stated her belief that the difference in learning patterns between China and the U.S. created difficulties for her in learning. She said, “I think that the learning pattern in China is, teachers give lectures while students learn the knowledge by memorizing the
textbook content, and the Chinese educational system does not require students to express their own opinions. I feel that Chinese learning habit has caused difficulties in my writing and classroom interaction, and I also feel that Chinese learning habits cause the insufficient of my critical thinking ability.”

“我觉得中国的学习习惯就是老师讲课，学生记忆，不要求学生表达自己的看法，我觉得这种习惯导致了我写作和课堂互动的困难，而且我觉得中国的学习习惯造成自己的批判性思维不足。”—Phoebe (Student)

In these statements, Phoebe notes the differences in learning and skill expectations from her education in China, and the skills that are required in U.S. classrooms, which she finds difficult to do given her lack of experience and instruction in such areas as critical thinking, academic writing styles in the U.S., and interacting with professors and peers in asking questions and discussing ideas.

In another example, Rachel, a Chinese student in the Math major, said that she was confused about higher-level, theoretical content during class, and she felt nervous when she sat around American students. She said, “I sometimes get nervous during class, I usually have trouble understanding conceptual or theoretical knowledge, and if my seat is surrounded by American classmates, I will be more nervous.”

“我有时候上课会很紧张，概念性的知识经常会听不懂，而且如果我的座位被美国同学包围，我会更紧张。”

Another Chinese student, Ross, also agreed that academic work involving higher-level, theoretical content was difficult. He mentioned, “I feel that the conceptual courses are difficult, but the calculating courses are very easy. There are some theoretical courses such as
macroeconomics and microeconomics, which have a lot of readings and many new words. I feel it is very difficult to understand it.”

“我感觉概念性强的课程比较困难，但是计算性的课程很容易，有一些偏向理论性的课程比如宏观经济学和微观经济学，阅读量很大，生词很多，我理解起来很吃力。”

Phoebe, Rachel, and Ross’s thoughts on the challenges they experience in their University A courses may have some of their foundation in China’s deep-rooted, traditional learning environment. In Chinese classrooms, students typically do not interact with faculty or other students, and many courses focus attention on lower-level academic skills and learning related to what will be tested on formal exams. This can result in reduced attention to students’ higher-level conceptual understanding, independent learning skills, as well as critical thinking abilities.

In support of this idea, Susan, a faculty member, pointed out her thought that the way students are taught in China focuses on rote learning and calculation, which makes coursework that requires creativity and adaptation skills more difficult for them. She mentioned, “Chinese international students are very hardworking, but they lack creativity. Due to the instructional way of teaching in China, many Chinese students don’t have the ability to think outside of the box, and they also don’t have sufficient ability to be comfortable with changes and challenges”

Another faculty member, Susie, also reflected on this focus on exam-based instruction and its consequences in students’ lack of independent research skills. She said, “Chinese students have very strong exam-taking abilities, but their ability to explore extracurricular content is very weak. They don't know how to apply the knowledge they learn from the classroom into their daily practice. As a result, many research-related projects are very challenging for Chinese
students. During research projects, Chinese students’ thinking ability is very inactive, and their independent research ability is also weak. Professors have to provide them clear instructions step by step.”

“中国学生的考试能力非常强，但是他们对课外内容的探索能力和研究能力非常弱，他们不知道如何把课堂上学习的知识运用到实践中，所以很多研究性的题目和课题会对学生有很大的挑战性。在做研究性课题的时候，中国学生的思维很不活跃，自主研究能力很弱，需要教授一步一步地提供明确的指示。”

Echoing Susan and Susie’s thoughts, Richard, a professor in the Math department, also believed that Chinese educational experiences did not cultivate for students the ability to think and make decisions independently. He pointed out, “Most Chinese students’ learning and living content are arranged by teachers and parents when they were in China. They lack the ability to think independently and make decisions by themselves since they were young. After coming to the United States, some Chinese students can’t even choose courses according to their own needs.”

“大多数中国学生在国内的时候一切学习和生活内容都被老师和家长安排好，他们从小就欠缺自己独立思考和独立选择的能力。到了美国以后，有些中国学生甚至不会根据自己的需求进行选课。”

Reflecting on the support her family had given her and how her University A professor helped her to think about her own future goals, Monica, a former Finance major student, pointed out that the decision made by parents can also cause a negative impact on students’ learning quality. She said, “I think that the curricula, like Finance, are very stressful, and I have no interest in this major. My parents believed that the salary of the financial professional is high, so they insisted I choose the Finance major. However, I encountered huge stress and difficulties,
and as a result, my professor suggested I withdraw from the finance courses, and I changed my major into Arts--and I love it.”

“我认为金融学这样的课程压力很大，而且自己对这方面没有兴趣，只是父母认为金融专业工资高，就让我选择了金融专业，但我学习金融专业很吃力，最后教授建议我退掉选课，换成了艺术专业，我很喜欢。”---Monica (Student)

Coping skills. Generally speaking, the methods which Chinese international students use when they face and adapt to their academic challenges are mainly in passive and self-adjusted ways. According to the interviews, most of the participants reported that they tend to deal with negative emotions by themselves instead of seeking help from the professors or the university. Two particular ways that participants mentioned students use to divert from academic challenges were substance use and online gaming.

Joey thought that he didn't have high learning efficiency, and he chose tobacco and alcohol to relax. He said, “I think that I don’t have strong learning efficiency. When I encounter academic pressure, I like to add pressure to myself to meet the challenge. After the exam, I will choose to play games the whole night to relax. I also use smoking and drinking to relax when I am stressed.”

“我自认为学习效率并不优秀，面对学业压力的时候，我喜欢给自己增加压力去迎合挑战，考试过后我会选择通宵打游戏来进行放松。在平时压力大的时候我会用吸烟和饮酒来放松自己。”---Joey (Student)

Ross, another Chinese student, also choose an unhealthy way to relax when he faced pressure. He said, “I would like to eat sweets treats and deep fried foods when I am under academic pressure. I mainly rely on assignment deadlines to give myself motivation.”
Faculty members and administrators also shared some of their concerns about Chinese international students’ learning attitude and extracurricular activities, especially their unhealthy living styles and the addiction to the internet and online games. Because Chinese students are by themselves during study abroad, they used to be guided by teachers and parents when they were in China but now they are far away from their parents’ supervision. At the same time, the academic success in the U.S. is heavily based on individual efforts. As the result, the educators at University A worry those factors will have negative impacts on Chinese students’ learning quality.

Susie thought that many Chinese students were addicted to the internet and video games, and some of them had really negative learning attitudes. She said, “Internet and video games are way too tempting for Chinese students, especially online games, which greatly affect students' daily learning quality. Sometimes students upload their assignment at 4 in the morning. In addition, some students have a very negative learning attitude, some students plan to directly return back to China after graduation, so they don’t care about classroom interaction and test scores. They insist that as long as they can graduate and earn the diploma, the test scores and GPA are not important.”

“网络和游戏对中国学生的诱惑力太大了，尤其是网络游戏，非常影响学生的日常学习，我有时候能看到学生凌晨四点上交作业的情况。此外，有些同学的学习态度很不好，他们打算毕业直接回国，所以他们对课堂表现和考试成绩都漠不关心，他们认为只要能毕业就够了，成绩好坏和绩点并不重要。”

---Susie (Faculty)
Richard, another faculty member also found that some Chinese students lack a sense of responsibility for themselves. He said, “Chinese students maintain a strong competitive environment from elementary school to high school in China, the learning pressure is very huge, but once they enter college, academic pressure becomes a lot easier. Many students don’t know what they should do, and they don’t have plans and goals for their academic path. In addition, due to the lack of parental supervision in the United States, parents in China don’t know their children’s true situation in the United States. Some Chinese students lack a sense of responsibility for themselves and have nothing to do every day.”

“中国学生在国内从小学一直到高中都保持着很强的竞争关系，学习压力非常大，但是一旦进入大学之后瞬间轻松了很多。很多学生就不知自己应该做什么，也没有学习规划和目标。此外由于在美国上学，缺少了家长的监督，家长也不了解学生在美国的情况。有些中国留学生缺乏对自己的责任感，每天无所事事。”

**Chinese language supports.** When Chinese international students encountered academic difficulties, such as understanding the course content in English, Chinese international students would choose to talk with other Chinese classmates, and use Chinese resources to help them in learning. Some Chinese students will translate the keywords into Chinese, discuss course content and homework with other Chinese students, and even find Chinese version of textbooks to help themselves to understand the academic content they learned from the classroom.

Howard thought that English proficiency caused barriers in his studies, and he used Chinese textbooks as a support material. He said, “I think that understanding the concept of theoretical knowledge is the most difficult part. I think it is mainly caused by language reasons. I will use the Chinese version of textbooks to help myself understanding and learning.”
“我觉得学习方面理解概念是最困难的部分，我认为主要是语言原因造成的，我会去找中文教材来帮助我理解和学习。” ---Howard (Student)

Judy, another Chinese student, also mentioned that she used Chinese textbooks as a support material. She said, “When I encounter learning difficulties, I will go directly to my Chinese classmates to discuss, instead of asking my professors, I will also find Chinese textbooks to help me understand the course content.”

“在遇到学习困难的时候我会直接找中国同学进行探讨，而不是去问教授，我也会找中文教材来帮助我理解课堂内容。”

Ben, a faculty member of the Math department, mentioned that he believed Chinese students gained more knowledge by the extracurricular discussion with their Chinese peers than from in-class lectures. He said, “Honestly speaking, I think Chinese international students can earn greater academic outcome by the extracurricular discussion with their Chinese peers. In-class teaching is not a very efficient way for Chinese students’ learning.”

**Communication with professors.** At the same time, many Chinese international students don’t like to actively communicate with professors. Many professors at University A have sufficient office hours and opportunities for Chinese international students to visit and communicate, but only a few students will take the initiative to contact their professors. Most students will not contact the professors until they encounter academic problems. Meanwhile, Chinese students are more inclined to communicate with professors by email instead of having the in-person conversation with the professors. However, Chinese international students would take the initiative and contact the professors only when they need the documents and letters of recommendation for their graduate school application.
Rachel thought that she preferred to communicate with Chinese peers rather than talk with her professors. She said, “I usually only contact the professor at a specific time. For example, when I apply for graduate schools, I will contact my professors to discuss the application documents and letters of recommendation. However, I usually ask my Chinese classmates if I have problems with the course content.”

“我一般只有的特定的时期会去主动和教授联系，比如在申请研究生的时候我会找教授沟通关于文书和推荐信的事情，但是平时遇到课程方面的问题我会直接问我的中国同学而不会去问教授。”

Monica, another Chinese student, mentioned that she didn’t like to communicate with professors because she didn’t want to bother professors and be impolite. She said, “I will not take the initiative to get in touch with my professors. I think this is also part of Chinese culture because I’m worried that my trivial matters will disturb the professor.”

“我不会主动与教授取得联系，我想这也是中国文化的一部分，我担心自己的小事会打扰到教授。”

A faculty member, Ben, also mentioned that Chinese students can get help from their own classmates so that they didn't need to come to professors for help. He said, “Chinese international students have their own community, they seldom come to me for help because they can tutor and help each other about the academic content. At the same time, Chinese students who are successful in academic are more willing to come visit and talk with me.”

Another faculty member, Susan, also believed that Chinese students didn’t ask professors for help because they help each other. She said, “I think Chinese international students have their own group and community, they don’t have to come to us for help because they can help each other in their own community. I also believe that being afraid to show their weakness is a big reason why they don’t want to reach out to their professors for help.”
In addition, the researcher thought that the reasons for Chinese international students not being willing to meet with professors were caused by English language barriers. As a result, the researcher also talked with two faculty members at University A who have Chinese as their native language, and the researcher expected that Chinese students will contact those Chinese speaking professors frequently because of the same linguistic and cultural background. However, the interview data showed that although most Chinese students don’t have language barriers with their professors, many of them still don’t want to actively communicate with their professors.

For example, Susie thought that she tried really hard to provide opportunities for Chinese students to visit her, however, she still needed to reach out to Chinese students by herself. She said, “I have reserved an extended office hours for Chinese students. I also speak Chinese with my students during the extracurricular time. However, when I find that some Chinese students don't understand in class or some students can't keep up with the learning content, I still need to contact them actively; otherwise, they will not come to me.”

“我为中国学生预留了很长的办公时间，而且我在课外时间都会用中文和学生进行交流。在发现有的学生课堂听不懂或者成绩跟不上的时候，我还是需要自己主动地去联系他们，否则他们不会来找我。”

Richard, another professor at the university, pointed out that many professors were willing to help Chinese students, but Chinese students didn’t communicate with professors and even provided what they perceived to be incorrect information to professors at times. Culturally, there are two main reasons why Chinese international students chose to hide their learning status and challenges with professors. First, in Chinese traditional culture, having learning difficulties proved that the student didn’t study hard enough, which is also a behavior of negative attitude and disrespectful to teachers. Second, Chinese international students also try to “save their face”
by hiding their true learning difficulties from professors in order to escape from the embarrassment.

Richard said, “Chinese students’ study attitudes are not very active. They usually don't come to me on their own initiative, so I can't get enough feedback from Chinese students. Sometimes I need to contact them to ask about their learning situation. In addition, many professors are very willing to help the Chinese international students to make progress and improvement, but we don’t know the specific situation of the students. Moreover, Chinese students are [sometimes] not willing to tell the truth to their professors. Once I was talking with a Chinese student with a poor grade, but he believed that he has no problem in learning, and he doesn’t need any help.”

“中国学生的学록态度不是很积极，他们不会主动来找我。所以我得不到来自学生的反馈。我有时候需要主动联系他们来了解他们的学习状况。此外，教授很愿意帮助学生取得进步，但我们不了解学生的具体情况。中国学生也不愿意与教授说实话。有一次我找一名成绩很差的中国学生来谈话，但是他自认为学习没有问题，不需要帮助。”

Class engagement. Moreover, the data collected from observations showed that in the daily class learning environments, the majority of Chinese international students don’t express their opinions or join discussions with professors and classmates. Instead, Chinese students preferred to talk with others in Chinese during class when they had challenges understanding the content.

Meanwhile, Chinese international students also tended to maintain a solid seating pattern: Students who interacted with the content and with professors sat in the front rows of the classrooms, while those students who don’t interact during class preferred to sit in groups in the back of the classroom with their electronic devices such as Ipads or laptops. The researcher also
found some U.S. students were sitting in the corner and playing with their devices; however, the U.S. students were able to join the class after texting, while many Chinese students were basically focused on their Ipad for the entire lecture.

During in-class observations, the researcher found that Chinese international students who sit in the back row are more quiet and less interactive during class and they continuously do online chatting on their electronic devices during the whole class time. The researcher observed one male Chinese student playing Mahjong; two female Chinese students were online chatting; and another female Chinese student was learning how to cook by watching Youtube videos throughout the researcher’s observation of an actuarial science class. The researcher also observed three Chinese students online chatting during the MBA class, with one of the three also online shopping for a Burberry for approximately two hours.

**Academic integrity.** In addition, the interview data also showed that some Chinese international students have insufficient academic ethics awareness compared with American students. In the interview, many professors reported to the researchers that some Chinese students lack academic integrity. This is usually reflected in their assignments.

Susie thought that her Chinese students copied assignment answers with each other and it was very common. She said, “Some assignments in this semester required students to complete on the internet. After the students finish the questions, the system will automatically announce the answers. This created an opportunity for Chinese students to copy the answer from others. I also conducted a quiz afterwards by using similar questions from the assignment, but Chinese students’ scores are very low, some of them only solved one question out of ten.”
“我这学期有的作业是要求学生在网络上完成上交的，学生在做完题目后系统会自动公布答案，这就造成了中国学生很普遍的互相抄袭现象，我事后进行了小测验，考题就是类似作业中的题目，但是中国学生的得分非常低，有的人十道题只做出一道。”---Susie (Faculty)

Janice, another faculty member at the university, pointed out that Chinese students in her class also had insufficient academic ethics awareness. She said, “I often have Chinese international students in my class. I remember there was one Chinese student who seldom interacted with me during class and was never willing to speak with American classmates; however, the assignment paper he handed in was perfect in both content and grammar, which made me very curious about whether the student wrote it by himself.”

**Language.** Chinese international students’ English language adaptation runs through the whole process of study abroad. The proficiency of English directly affects the academic and cultural adaptation of Chinese international students. Although Chinese international students already participated in English language training for many years in China and many of them already passed the English proficiency requirement of the University A, a large population of Chinese international students still face the difficulties and challenges caused by language barriers.

Many participants told the researcher that the English language training they had in China didn’t truly improve their English proficiency, especially the English courses offered by their domestic colleges and third-party English language training courses which are mainly focused on improving test scores instead of English proficiency.

Judy thought that English language training courses in China were inefficient. She stated, “English classes offered at universities in China are almost useless, I only needed to sit in
the classroom, many students basically never listened to teachers. I also attended some extracurricular English training programs, but those trainings were mainly focused on test taking skills and tricks; those English courses didn’t improved my English proficiency.”

“国内大学的英语课几乎没什么用，只要人去教室里坐着就行了，大家基本上没听过。我也上过课外的英语培训班，主要是以应试技巧为主，并不会真的帮助我提高语言能力。”---Judy (Student)

As the result of exam-oriented English training, many Chinese international students have a dismatch of their English test score and their truly English proficiency. Although some Chinese international students have decent test scores, their oral and written English proficiency might be still insufficient.

In addition, according to the partnership between the University A and the JS University, the University A sent faculties to teach English at JS University, and faculty members at University A believed that sending professors to teach in China is a good way to improve Chinese students’ English proficiency; however, Chinese students didn’t enjoy the English teaching, and they believed that sending foreign professors had more help in cultural experience than English improvement.

Ben, a professor of the Math department, thought it was necessary for Chinese students to have English training courses after they arrived in the U.S. He said, “Our university sent faculties to teach English at JS University, but Chinese students didn’t like the English teaching courses, and their English proficiency were very insufficient, so we created a policy that every Chinese student who comes from JS University has to participate in English language training program at University A during the summer before the new academic semester starts.”

---Ben (Faculty)
Howard also pointed out that although the University A sent English language instructors to teach in China, the efficiency was still very insufficient. He stated,

“We had American professors came to teach English courses, but the courses was only worked as a brief introduction section. We experienced the American way of teaching and the activities in class, however, we didn't receive much improvement of English proficiency from those courses because the time length of those courses was short and the teaching content was about English language instead of academic content.”

“美国那这边会有教授来我们大学教英语课，但是只起到了带入作用，让我们体验了一下美国的教学风格和课堂氛围，但是真正对英语水平的提高不大。”

---Howard (Student)

Although Chinese international students are not willing to initiate the communication with Americans in English, many of them still claimed that the major improvement of English proficiency was made in the U.S. and they believed that the English speaking environment in both academic and social context really provides them an opportunity to learn English.

Ross believed that living with American roommates was very important in improving his English skills. He stated, “I lived on campus with an American roommate in my first year, we often talked for two or three hours at a time, which was very helpful for my English. Talking to my American roommate helped me with my pronunciation, and my listening skills were improved, and talking to my roommate also helped me understand many daily topics.”

“在美国的第一年住在学校宿舍里，有一个美国室友，我们每次都能交谈两三个小时，这对我的英语提升非常有帮助。和美国室友对话帮助我纠正发音，我的听力水平也得到了提高，另外和美国室友交流也帮助我了解了更多的日常的话题。”
During daily studying in the U.S., Chinese international students experience the language barrier all the time. They have difficulty understanding the teaching content during class, they feel nervous talking to professors and American classmates, they also struggle in writing and giving presentations. According to the data collected from the interviews and observations, English writing and speaking skills are two biggest linguistic barriers for Chinese international students. For example, some Chinese students prefer to avoid using English. Rachel pointed out that she would not participate in this study if she had to speak English during the interview. She said, “If you want to use English for this interview, I will directly refuse to participate.”

“如果你要用英语对话的话，我会直接拒绝你的采访。”---Rachel (Student)

Judy, another Chinese student, also found that speaking and writing are the most difficult for her. She stated, “I think the biggest challenge in English is speaking and writing, because I don’t have extensive vocabulary, and English language training in China didn’t provide speaking practice. I also am not familiar with writing patterns in English, so I used to think about the article in Chinese, then translate it into English.”

“我觉得英语方面最大的困难来自口语和写作，因为我的词汇量比较少，再加上国内的英语教学没有口语练习。写作方面我不了解英语写作的模式，我习惯写作的时候先用中文进行思考，然后再翻译成英文。”

Another Chinese student, Phoebe, also pointed out that there were many new vocabulary words in daily communication which made it very challenging for her to speak English. She stated, “My daily communication with Americans is limited to topics that I am familiar with. If I encounter a new topic that I am not familiar with, I will not be able to understand due to new
vocabularies and idioms. In addition, many topics in the daily communication are unfamiliar to me, such as renting a house, register the Internet service, and describe the symptoms in the hospital. You can’t learn these topics from the classroom.”

“我在和美国人的日常交流只局限在我熟悉的话题方面，如果遇到我不熟悉的话题，因为生词很多，我会听不懂。此外在日常交流中很多话题是陌生的，比如租房，办理网络，还有去医院描述症状，这些都没办法从课堂中学到。”

Rachel also mentioned that she preferred to write in Chinese and translated the content into English afterwards. She said, “I feel that the English proficiency has always been a hindrance to me, especially my writing ability. My struggle with English writing was super obvious in writing application letters for postgraduate studies. I always need to prepare in Chinese and then translate my article into English. I really want to improve my English, especially grammar and cultural vocabulary.”

“我觉得英语水平一直是我的阻碍，尤其是写作能力，这一点我在申请研究生的文书上体现得很明显，我一直在用中文构思然后翻译成英文，我很想提高我的英语水平尤其是语法和文化词汇方面。”

---Rachel (Student)

Howard, another Chinese student, thought that he lacked confidence due to insufficient English proficiency. He stated,“My English speaking is not good, I don't have the courage to speak, so I seldom speak during class, which caused the low participation score. Moreover, poor speaking skills will also make me lack confidence in my contact with Americans. In addition, I will tend to read the Chinese version of the textbook instead of the English version.”

“我的口语不好，没有勇气开口说话，所以课堂上经常插不上话，课堂的参与度很低，而且口语不好会使我在和美国人的接触中缺乏自信。此外，在日常阅读中我会倾向于看中国版的教材。”
Susie, a faculty member of the Math department, also mentioned that she was worried about some Chinese students because their English proficiency was insufficient. She stated, “To be honest, I feel that many Chinese students’ English proficiency is really bad. Because I teach in English, I can clearly feel that several Chinese students are completely lost during class. Once I asked a Chinese student: Do you have any classes next Tuesday? I asked him three times in a row and he still didn't understand it. Moreover, Chinese students’ writing skills are also very bad and they have many grammar problems. However, excellent writing skills are essential skills for their graduate studies. I am very worried about them.”

“说实话我觉得现在很多中国学生的英语水平很差，因为我教英语课，我能很明显地感觉到有几位同学完全是听不懂的。有一次我问一个同学：你下周二有课吗？我连续问了三遍他都没听懂。还有就是学生的写作能力太差了，他们的语法有很多问题，但是优秀的写作能力是他们在读研究生的必备技能，我很为他们担心。”

University A provides English language training courses to Chinese international students who can’t meet the language proficiency requirement. However, the researcher received different perspectives toward the English training program from interviews with both Chinese international students and faculty members/administrators, and the feedback collected from Chinese international students is highly variable based on the ... Some students believe they benefited from the English training program while others think the English training program is a waste of time and money.

Ross thought that the language training program provided by the University A was very helpful. He stated, “I think our university's language courses are very useful, the communication atmosphere is particularly nice, and the professors will encourage students to improve their English expression skills through classroom communication and presentation. Language classes
during the summer vacation are also very helpful, especially for American culture courses. The professors have a lot of useful knowledge to help me integrate into the American classroom as soon as possible.”

“我觉得学校的语言课程还是很不错的，交流氛围特别好，教授也会鼓励学生通过课堂交流和做展示来提高英语表达能力。暑假期的语言课也很有帮助，尤其是美国文化的课程，教授讲了很多有用的知识，帮助我尽快融入美国课堂。”---Ross (Student)

However, Joey, another Chinese student, believed that the language training program provided by the University A was a waste of time and tuition fee. He said, “I feel that language training classes in our university are a waste of time and tuition fee, those language classes have very limited effect on English improvement. Although the professors are very hardworking and responsible, the textbooks content are disconnected with my study life, and there is no resources for me to learn daily social skills. I’d rather to do self learning or socialize with American friends to improve my English than attend the language training classes.”

“我觉得在学校上语言课就是浪费时间和学费，语言课对英语的作用有限，尽管教授都很认真也很负责任，但是教材与我的学习生活脱节，也没有办法学习日常生活用语。我觉得上学校的语言班还不如把时间用来自学或者和美国人社交来提高英语水平。”

At the same time, due to the social/cultural differences between China and the U.S., many Chinese participants also mentioned that they experienced cultural differences after they came to study in the U.S.

**Culture.** Studying abroad can be a meaningful way to explore and experience the foreign culture and at the same time of obtaining knowledge. In a foreign country, the cultural shock caused by the difference in historical and cultural background is unavoidable to every international student.
In recent years, more and more Chinese international students come to study in the U.S., and when they come to study in an American university, the Chinese culture familiar to them no longer exists, which can cause frustration and anxiety.

Many Chinese student participants claimed that they have experienced the cultural differences and they admitted that cultural differences exist in both academic studying and daily living. The main reasons of cultural differences are the different social and historical environments between China and the U.S.

Joey thought that he experienced the cultural differences between China and the U.S. in many ways. He stated, “The biggest cultural difference I encountered in the U.S. is the American lifestyle, including shopping and going to hospital. The living style in the U.S. are very different from China. In addition, I live with my Chinese classmates in a single house and we need to take care of the lawn, dump trash, and shovel snow all by ourselves, or we will be complained and reported. I never experienced this strong sense of community responsibility in China. In addition, cultural differences can also affect my daily communication. American classmates often like to discuss sensitive social topics such as politics, sex, and guns. I have never discussed such topics publicly in China, so I feel very resistant and very uncomfortable, which also create a sense of isolation.”

“到了美国感觉的最大的差异就在于生活方式，包括购物和看病，都和国内很不一样。此外，我和同学合租住在一个独栋需要自己打理草坪，收垃圾，铲雪，不然会被报，这种很强的社区责任感是国内从来没有体验过的。文化差异也会影响我的日常交流，美国同学很喜欢讨论敏感话题，比如政治，性，和枪支，在中国我从来没有公开讨论过这类话题，所以我会觉得很抵触，很不舒服，会产生一种隔离感。”

---Joey (Student)
Rachel, another Chinese student, found the cultural differences between China and the U.S. happened in daily life. She stated, “The cultural differences I feel are mainly in the communication with strangers. In China, we were taught not to talk to strangers when we were little kids, but in the United States, I found that strangers are very like to communicate with me, even in elevators. Many strangers just like to initiative to talk to me.”

“我感受到的文化差异主要是在与陌生人的交流方面，在中国我从小就被教育不要和陌生人说话，但是到了美国我发现陌生人很喜欢和我交流，哪怕是在电梯里也经常有美国人主动找我聊天。”

Howard thought that the cultural differences between China and the U.S. made him feel unsafe. He stated, “The cultural differences I feel is that the gap between the local area and my city in China is particularly large. The cities and communities in the United States feel very deserted and I always need to be careful about the people around me. However, I have never need to worry about my security when I’m in China.”

“文化差异上我觉得学校周边和我在国内的城市差距特别大，美国的城市和社区感觉很冷清而且要时刻小心身边的人，我在中国从来没有担心过安全问题。”---Howard (Student)

Chinese students also pointed out that the cultural differences have very little impact on their academic study; however, the cultural differences play a very important role in their English language learning.

Howard thought that the cultural differences between China and the U.S. had limited influence on his professional studies, but had a big influence on his communication skills. He stated, “Cultural differences have very little effect on my professional studies, because my majors rely on calculations and formulas, and have almost no cultural content. I also only stay with American classmates during class, and I will return to a Chinese cultural environment.
immediately after class. My family only cares about my grades and graduate school application, and they don't care if I can integrate into American culture or not. I also believe that cultural differences will affect my English learning, because cultural differences can reduce my enthusiasm for communication. I always worry about that American classmates will misunderstand me.”

“文化差异对我的专业学习没什么影响，因为我的专业都是依靠计算和公式，几乎遇不到文化方面的内容，我只有在课堂接触美国人，一下课就会回到中国的文化环境里。我的家人也只关心我的成绩和升学情况，他们不会在乎我是否融入了美国文化。我觉得文化差异会影响我的英语学习，因为文化差异减少了我交流的积极性，我总是担心美国同学会误解我。”---Howard (Student)

Joey, another Chinese student, pointed out that cultural differences create barriers between him and American classmates. He said, “Cultural differences make me reluctant to communicate with Americans during class, I prefer to find other Chinese students to cooperate and discuss. In English learning process, because of limited English proficiency and cultural differences, I don’t have American friends, which is an obstacle for me to practice English, eventually, I cannot adapt to cultural differences, this is a vicious circle”

“文化差异让我不愿意和美国人交流，在课堂上我也喜欢找中国同学合作和讨论。在英语学习方面，由于英语水平和文化差异，我交往不到美国朋友，这很不利于我提高英语，最终使我无法适应文化差异，这就是一个恶性循环。”

Joey also mentioned that Chinese students isolated themselves from Americans. He stated, “I will try to communicate with Americans to learn and contact American culture, but most Chinese students are not willing to communicate with Americans. The Chinese students group phenomenon is very obvious. Many Chinese students directly copy their lifestyle from
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their domestic universities into the U.S., they are only concerned about academic learning and online games, and have almost zero social contact with Americans.”

“我自己会努力和美国人交流来了解和接触美国文化。但是中国学生大多数都不乐于和美国人沟通，存在很明显的中国人圈子现象。中国学生直接把在国内大学的生活状态复制到了美国。他们眼里只有学习和网络游戏，和美国人几乎没有社交。”

After encountering cultural differences, Chinese international students’ solutions are variable based on individual’s experience and living styles; some of them prefer to create a Chinese environment for themselves and refuse to contact with American culture and some of them are willing to learn about the cultural differences between China and the U.S. For example, Jack thought that he viewed cultural differences in other ways. He stated, “I will calmly and objectively think about the cultural differences between China and the United States. I will also try to look at the issues from different perspectives. For example, I can view the Trade War in both China and the U.S. perspectives, I’m also sharing new thoughts and new ways of thinking to my family in China”

“我会对中国和美国的文化差异进行冷静客观的思考，我也会试着用中国和美国两种角度去看待问题，比如站在中国和美国的立场上看待贸易战，我同样也会把新的思想和新的思维方式传递给我在国内的家人。”---Jack (Student)

At the same time, participants also reflected to the researcher that the peer pressure is an important reason that Chinese students are always sticking with each other as a group. Susan, a faculty member at the university, reflected that she believed that the “larger the population of the Chinese students, less American culture can have an impact on them.”

At the same time, Rachel mentioned the peer pressure among Chinese students. She said, “Many Chinese students are unwilling to contact Americans and are not willing to be too
close to Americans. Some Chinese students worry that being the unique individual who always
hangs out with American students will be segregated by other Chinese students, and lose Chinese
friends.”

“很多中国学生不愿意接触美国人，也不愿意和美国人过于亲密，很多中国学生会担心成为与众不同的人，会被其他中国同学疏远，会失去中国朋友。”

Faculty members and administrators at University A were also very interested in the
cultural differences between China and the U.S., as well as the reaction Chinese international
students make during the cultural adaptation. Faculty members also pointed out that the cultural
differences may impact Chinese students’ studying behaviors, such as classroom participation,
critical thinking, and the ability to question the authority.

In order to provide cultural support to Chinese international students, University A
provides many activities and events for Chinese international students, which also gave Chinese
students many opportunities to learn about other cultures and practice English with American
students. However, the Chinese students’ motivation to participate in university held events is
different than expected.

Rachel thought that there had to be some bonus as motivation for Chinese students to
communicate with Americans. She said, “I helped organized a campus treasure hunt, which
required that the team has to be one Chinese student and one American student, our goal was to
help Chinese students to make new American friends, so that they can improve their English
skills and improve the class participation rate, but many Chinese students who came to
participate felt that it was not necessary to have American friends. They only participated in
activities because professors would give extra credits to players.”
“我帮助组织了一次校园寻宝活动，规定一个中国学生和一个美国学生组成双人小组进行寻宝，我们的本意是帮助中国学生认识美国同学，有利于提高中国学生的英语水平和课堂参与度。但是很多来参加的中国学生觉得没有必要认识美国朋友，他们来参与活动只是因为会有加分。”---Rachel (Student)

The faculty members and administrators believe that the cultural adaptation is very important and beneficial to Chinese students, because learning and experiencing American culture can help Chinese students feel more comfortable during class interaction, and can also improve Chinese students’ English proficiency by making American friends.

Richard, a faculty member of the university, mentioned about the barrier for Chinese students to adapt to American culture. He stated, “It is necessary for Chinese students to understand and adapt to American culture, it can increase the opportunities for Chinese students to interact with American culture and students, and help to break the micro-society of Chinese students. Moreover, adapting to American culture does not mean giving up Chinese culture, it is necessary for international students to understand and contact local culture. Only a few students are willing to openly contact American society and American culture, but they can't affect other Chinese students. Most Chinese students are still very solid in their own small communities. The popularity of the Internet can indeed reduce the discomfort caused by cultural differences, but it also weakens the awareness and motivation of Chinese students to communicate with Americans.”

“了解和融入美国文化非常有必要，它可以增加中国学生和美国本土文化和学生的交流机会，能帮助打破中国学生的圈子现象。而且适应美国文化不代表放弃中国文化，留学生有必要了解和接触当地的文化。只有少数学生愿意开放地接触美国社会和美国文化，但是他们没办法感染其他中国同学，大多数中国学生还是非常固化在自己的小圈子里。网络的普及确实可以减弱文化差异带来的不适，但是也减弱了中国学生和美国人交流和融入的意识。”
Meanwhile, the Office of International Affairs at University A also provided partnerships between Chinese students and American students, known as IPALs, and the University A recruits American students to work one on one with Chinese international students as conversation partners in order to help Chinese students improve their English communication skills and become familiar with American culture. Many faculty members/administrators strongly believe that the IPAL program can have a positive impact and help Chinese international students, but some Chinese students told the researcher that the IPAL is not as efficient as it looks like.

Joey found that the IPAL program at University A was not as helpful as he thought. He stated, “The university’s intention to assign IPAL for Chinese students is very nice and warm, I am also looking forward to having the kind of friendship in the TV show “The Big Bang Theory”, however, many IPALs are very irresponsible, they only want to complete the tasks assigned by the university, they don’t really want to be friends with us.”

“学校给我们中国学生安排IPAL的本意很好，我也很期待能在美国拥有像美剧《生活大爆炸》里那种友情，但是实际上很多IPAL很不负责任，他们只是在完成学校分配的任务，并不是真心想和我们做朋友。”---Joey (Student)

Social justice and discrimination. During interviews, many Chinese international students mentioned that they were discriminated against during their study at University A, which was a surprise for the researcher because as a higher education institute which values international education, University A is supposed to be a safe place for every individual. The discriminations happened in classrooms, extracurricular activities, and daily social lives.
Another interesting finding from the interviews is that the data is different from the researcher’s assumption. As a member of the minority group in the U.S., the researcher assumed that Chinese students might be discriminated by Caucasians; however, according to the data collected from the research, the Chinese students reported that racial offenders are from both majority and minority groups. According to the interview, three out of nine Chinese students reported that they were discriminated by others. Two of them mentioned African Americans, the other one mentioned Caucasian.

Jack thought that the superiority sense of Americans made him feel very uncomfortable. He stated, “Americans have a very strong sense of superiority, and they have always regarded China as an enemy and threat of the United States. During the class, professors often use China as an example, and many of the contents are not the truth, which makes me feel very uncomfortable.”

“美国人有一种很强烈的优越感，而且一直把中国看作美国的敌人和威胁，在课上老师经常用中国来举例，而且很多内容并不是事实真相，让我很不舒服。”---Jack (Student)

Joey also found the discrimination existed in his daily life. He said, “The discrimination I have experienced is mainly in daily life. For example, when shopping in the supermarket, there are some customers and staff members who have a bad attitude toward us. In addition, I often go to a stadium near the university to play basketball. I often encounter many high school age students around the area, especially African Americans. They often yell at me with curse words that discriminate against Asians. They also take the initiative to challenge and insult us.”
“我经历的歧视主要是在生活方面。比如在超市购物的时候有一些顾客和工作人员态度很差。此外，我经常去学校附近的一个球场打篮球，经常会遇到很多周边的年轻人，尤其是黑人，他们经常会对我说一些带有歧视亚洲人的词语，他们会主动过来挑衅，会辱骂我们。”---Joey (Student)

Ross, another Chinese student, mentioned that discrimination also existed in the classroom. He stated, “The professor of the Mathematics Writing class was a Caucasian male. He was very disrespectful to the Chinese students in his class. When he talked to us, he didn’t look at us in the eye, he always looked up at the ceiling. Even if sometimes we couldn’t understand the teaching content, he never slows down and never explains to us. However, there was an Arabic classmate in our class. The professor took special care of him, the professor also volunteered to help him with his homework after class. I think our Chinese students were discriminated by that professor.”

“数学写作课的教师是一个白人，他对班上的中国学生很不尊重，对话的时候不会看着我们，而是仰着头看天花板，即使有的地方我们听不懂他也不会停下来解释。我们班里还有一个阿拉伯同学，那个教师对他特别关照，课下还主动帮他辅导作业，我认为受到了歧视。”---Ross (Student)

Moreover, during the interviews, only one out of nine faculty members/administrators mentioned social justice topics. This was also the only non-Caucasian participant among faculty members/administrators. The participant told the researcher that the reason why she mentioned social justice was because she was also discriminated before. The researcher believes that the different racial background of faculty members/administrators can create different lens and perspectives toward social justice and discrimination.

University support and suggestions. In order to support international students, University A has many programs, facilities, and professionals that provide support in many different aspects in both academics daily life. Most of Chinese international students are highly
satisfied with the personal attention they received from the university and they appreciate and enjoy the activities held by the University A.

Ross thought the university, especially the OIA, was very friendly to international students. He stated, “The university is super friendly to international students, and it also provides us with many opportunities to represent ourselves, and the campus is also highly internationalized. The relationship between international students and American students and professors is very harmonious. In particular, OIA has been particularly helpful to us and often organizes many events to create opportunities for our Chinese students to integrate into the US campus.”

“学校对国际学生特别友好，也给我们提供了很多展示自我的机会，而且校园的国际化程度很高，国际学生和美国学生，教授的关系都很融洽。尤其是OIA对我们的帮助特别大，经常会举办很多活动，为我们中国学生融入美国校园创造机会。” ---Ross (Student)

Chandler, another Chinese student, also found the OIA created a welcoming environment for Chinese students. He states, “OIA has organized a lot of activities for Chinese students, which makes us feel very cordial, OIA often celebrates the Chinese traditional festivals with us, such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival. Which makes us feel beloved in a foreign country, and it also indicates that the university is very respectful of Chinese culture, and very caring about Chinese students”

“OIA为中国学生举办了很多活动，让我们觉得特别亲切，尤其是在中国节日的时候OIA都会为我们庆祝节日，比如春节和中秋节，让我们在异国他乡感受到了来自校方的关怀，说明大学非常尊重中国文化，也非常关心中国留学生。”

However, many faculty members, administrators, as well as Chinese students also reflected on many valuable suggestions to the University A, including both academic and social
life, such as professional development, students education, English training program, housing, and IPALs

In the academic aspect, participants suggest that University A takes advantage of Chinese students’ community in order to provide opportunities for Chinese students to help each other. Select some Chinese students who have better academic performance as teaching assistants, and invite successful alumni come back to campus to share their experiences and suggestions. Moreover, some Chinese students also suggest the university create more opportunities for them to practice their research skills, which will be very helpful for their graduate school application.

Ross thought that the university should select and hire outstanding Chinese students to help others. He stated, “When Chinese students encounter academic difficulties, they are more inclined to ask Chinese students for help. I think universities should use this opportunity to select some Chinese students with good academic performance as teaching assistants or tutors to help both Chinese and American students who have difficulties in learning. In addition, universities should organize more alumni reunion activities, invite outstanding alumni to give presentations or workshops for Chinese students, and share their experience and advice with Chinese students.”

“在学习遇到困难的时候中国学生更倾向于找中国同学求助，我觉得大学应该利用这个机会来选拔一些学习成绩好的中国学生作为助教或者辅导员，对学习遇到困难的同学进行帮助。此外，大学也应该组织更多的校友交流活动，邀请优秀的毕业生回来为中国学生做报告，为中国学生提供经验和建议。”

---Ross (Student)

In the linguistic aspect, participants suggest that the University A provide English communication workshops to practice English and improve Chinese students’ presentation skills,
and encourage Chinese students in all majors and all different levels of English proficiency to participate in order to reduce Chinese internationals students’ fear and discomfort in speaking English.

Monica suggested the university continue the English training courses. She said, “I suggest that universities can continue the English training course, which can improve the English level of Chinese students, and also help Chinese students to close the gap of high testing scores with low English proficiency. In addition, the university can also organize double loop support programs for Chinese and American students to help each other academically and linguistically, which can not only improve the English proficiency of Chinese students, but also helps improve the academic performance of American students.”

“我建议大学可以把英语培训课程延续下去，这样可以提高中国学生的英语水平，也有利于让学生改善高分低能的英语现状。此外，大学还可以组织中美学生的交流互助项目，在学术上和语言上互相帮助，这样不仅能提高中国学生的英语水平，也有助于提高美国学生的学习成绩。”

In the cultural aspect, participants suggest that the University A should improve the selection and management protocol of IPALs in order to enhance the bonding effect of IPALs, and create more opportunities for both Chinese and American students to make friends with each other. Phoebe suggested the university hire American students who were interested in Chinese culture to be Ipals. She said,

“I hope that universities can recruit American students who are interested in Chinese culture to be IPALs, such as recruiting volunteers from the Asian culture club of the university. This will help create opportunities for students from both China and the United States to introduce themselves and have a common topic about Chinese culture.
Hiring American students who love Chinese culture will also increase the friendship between Chinese and American students and help improve the English communication proficiency of Chinese students. Moreover, I suggest the university can make connections with other colleges in the local area, and host events for Chinese international together. This can provide Chinese international students more opportunities to make new friends.”

“我希望大学能招募对中国文化感兴趣的美国学生来做IPALs，比如从大学的亚洲社团中招募志愿者，这样有助于为中美双方的学生创造了交流的机会，他们可以互相介绍自己的文化，而且雇佣热爱中国文化的美国学生也会增加中美学生的友谊，有利于提高中国学生的英语交流水平。另外，我建议大学可以和周边的其他大学建立联系，共同为中国留学生举办活动，增加交流机会，这样也有助于中国学生在美国扩大交友范围，认识更多的新朋友。”

Chandler expected the university to provide more resources and opportunities for Chinese students to organize their own events. He said, “I hope that the university can support Chinese students to organize our own cultural activities to introduce and present Chinese culture to Americans. I also hope that the university can encourage American students to learn and understand Chinese culture, which will not only promote the friendship between Chinese students and American students, but also helps eliminate prejudice and misunderstanding.”

“我希望学校能支持中国学生自己举办自己的文化活动，向美国人介绍和展示中国文化，我也希望大学能鼓励美国学生主动了解和接触中国文化，这样不但可以促进中国学生和美国学生的友谊，同时也助于消除偏见和误解。”

At the same time, Jack suggested the university provide daily support for Chinese international students such as shuttle buses for shopping and commuting in local areas. He stated, “I hope that the university can provide Chinese students with a shuttle bus every weekend to go shopping for food and daily grocery. Because many Chinese students do not have
a car, it is very inconvenient to go shopping. In addition, the university can also organize some cultural experience activities for Chinese students to live with American families on weekends or holidays, which can not only improve the communication skills of Chinese students, but also create opportunities for Chinese students to experience American culture.”

Moreover, many participants also talked about the housing situation of Chinese students; many Chinese students reported that they really want to live on campus with American roommates; however, the university’s policy on campus housing has two main disadvantages that keep Chinese internationals away. First, on campus housing is very inconvenient for international students because they will be asked to move out during vacations, which leaves Chinese students nowhere to stay during the holidays; second, the rent is too expensive for Chinese students. The monthly rent of living on campus is a lot more expensive than living off campus with other Chinese students.

Ross pointed out that the price gap between on campus and off campus was huge. He said,

“I lived in the campus dormitory for one semester and the rent was $5,500 per semester. I am currently sharing an apartment with my Chinese friends and each person now costs only $1,500 for one semester. The price gap is too big.”

“我住在学校宿舍一学期住宿费是5500美金。我现在和中国同学一起合租了一间公寓，每个人现在只要1500美金一学期，价格差距太大了。”---Ross (Student)
Since most of Chinese international students are living off campus with other Chinese friends and isolate themselves from American peers, the university should design and create an “international house” for both American and international students to live together, and hire both Chinese and American students as resident assistants and provide them opportunities to live, study, and work together.

In addition, faculty members and administrators also proposed that the university should provide more professional training, more opportunities to educate American students and professors about working experiences and knowledge with International students, and provide Chinese students more support before and after they come to study in the U.S.

In the very beginning, both Chinese international students and the university should figure out why Chinese students come to study in the U.S., so that both sides can have a clear view on expectations and goals. In order to discover the true status of Chinese international students, both Chinese students and the university should be honest and willing to communicate with each other.

Moreover, both Chinese students and the university need to be ready for challenges and face the difficulties together. Chinese students need to be prepared by improving their English proficiency, be open minded to interact with American professors and friends, and recognize the importance of cultural adaptation. At the same time, the university needs to provide education and training for students, faculty, and staff about diversity and global education, as well as provide more both linguistic and cultural support to Chinese international students during their time studying in the U.S.
Susan suggested the Chinese students and American universities have a clear view and understand each other. She said, “I think Chinese students should have a clear view on their goals in studying abroad, at the same time, the university should also understand why do Chinese students come to study abroad, we have to discover the motivations and challenges, or we are just trying to solve a problem which never existed.”---Susan (Faculty)

Emily, an administrator of the University A, pointed out that “Both Chinese students and American students need to be honest and open to each other, they should be encouraged to communicate with each other under the premise of respect, equality, and trust.” Another administrator, Emma, also stated that “Our Chinese students’ population is increasing every year, so it’s very necessary for the university to get ready and be prepared. I suggest the university send faculty members and administrators to China to experience the Chinese culture, and our educators also should have more frequent communication with colleagues who are working with Chinese students in other institutions to share experiences and knowledge. At the same time, the university needs to create more opportunities for Chinese students to communicate with American students and professors. We can also benefit from professional training and public education to every level of personnel on campus, including university leaders, professors, staff members, and students, to let them realize that having Chinese international students on campus is value for everyone.”

Janice also mentioned that the university support should be extended and expanded according to Chinese students’ learning process. She said, “It is very important for our educators to recognize the comfort level of Chinese students, our university provides Chinese international students with powerful support during their first year on campus, but I really hope the university
support can be extended and expanded according to Chinese students’ learning process, especially the English training program and the IPALs program.”---Janice (Faculty)

Meanwhile, faculty members at the University A also have many valuable suggestions for Chinese international students to be well prepared before coming to study in the U.S., in academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects.

Many faculty members and administrators suggest Chinese students try to learn and get familiar with American culture-- both classroom culture and social culture --before they come to the U.S., which can help them feel less uncomfortable and better prepared. Watching American TV shows and daily news can be very beneficial to Chinese students, which can not only improve Chinese students’ English proficiency, but also can introduce the American culture to Chinese students. At the same time, they also encourage Chinese students to develop their English proficiency, decision-making skills, independent ability, and creative thinking skills in China before they come to study in the U.S.

Susie suggested the future Chinese students be well prepared before study abroad. She pointed out that, “I hope that Chinese students could work hard to improve their English, especially communication and writing skills, before coming to the United States. In addition, I suggest that Chinese students obtain a solid fundamental knowledge before coming to the U.S. At the same time, Chinese students also should improve their learning efficiency, optimize their learning methods, and improve their learning ability in all aspects.”

“我希望中国学生在来美国学习之前一定要努力提高自己的英语水平，尤其是交流能力和写作能力。此外，我建议中国学生在国内一定要打牢基础知识，提高学习效率，优化学习方法，使自己学习能力全方位得到提高。”--Susie (Faculty)
Conclusion. The adaptation of Chinese international students to the U.S. campus is a long-term and complex process that runs through the whole process of studying abroad. The adaptation of international students involves a wide range of content. Through the analysis of the document review and interviews of the students, faculty members, and administrators, the researcher believes that the data content can be summarized into three aspects: academic aspect, linguistic aspect and cultural aspect.

In the academic aspect, most of Chinese international students have satisfactory academic performance; however, due to the different language and culture between China and the U.S., Chinese international students are insufficient in classroom participation, prefer to solve problems with Chinese peers rather than communicating with professors, and have difficulties in theoretical academic content and academic writing. In addition, Chinese international students also lack independent research skills and the awareness of academic honesty.

In the linguistic aspect, Chinese international students didn’t receive high quality communication oriented English training in China before they came to the U.S. Although they might have passed the English proficiency test, their English proficiency is still insufficient. During daily studying, English writing and speaking are two biggest barriers for Chinese students. University A provides an English training program for Chinese international students, however participants pointed out that the English courses should be expanded and extended, and the teaching content needs to be updated.
The participants also suggested the university discover and understand the fear and comfort level of Chinese students to speak English, in order to provide support and encourage Chinese international students to improve their English proficiency.

In the cultural aspect, Chinese student participants claimed that they have experienced the cultural differences, and admitted that cultural differences exist in both academic study and daily living. Cultural differences also have a negative impact on students’ English improvement, and increase the difficulty for Chinese students to make American friends. Some Chinese students are willing to learn and experience the American culture, while the majority of Chinese students prefer to create a Chinese community and isolate themselves from the outside world. The participants suggested that both Chinese students and the university should be open and honest to each other in cultural communication, and the university should provide more cultural education for faculty members, administrators, and students. Moreover, the university is expected to improve the selection and management of IPALs, in order to strengthen the IPALs’ bonding affect between Chinese students and the U.S. community.

After the data collection and the data analysis, the researcher gained a better understanding about Chinese international students’ current status, challenges, and suggestions, as well as the perspectives toward Chinese international students and suggestions provided by faculty members and administrators at the University A. A deeper discussion about the research content and suggestions are provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and discussion
This qualitative research was a case study based on a particular, small, liberal arts, international-focused university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The research was designed and delivered to discover and understand the current status and challenges Chinese students have during their study abroad in the U.S. The research questions of this study were designed in four aspects:

1. What are the academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges Chinese students face in studying at University A in the United States?
2. How are these challenges formed and why?
3. What are the perspectives of university administrator/faculty toward Chinese students?
4. How can universities and educators effectively support Chinese international students in relation to these challenges (universities and educators both in China and in the U.S.)?

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Chinese international students faced challenges in academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects, they were uncomfortable to communicate with professors and American students, they had difficulties in writing and speaking, and they experienced discrimination during their time studying abroad in the U.S. At the same time, faculty members and administrators at University A pointed out that many Chinese international students were very hardworking and good at taking exams, however many Chinese students had insufficient in English skills and independent research skills, and they preferred to isolate themselves from American society and the English speaking environment.
In this chapter, the research discussed the connections between the data collected from the research and the literature in chapter 2, as well as the connections between the implications for practice and prior research/researchers. At the same time, the researcher also provided suggestions for both current and prospective Chinese international students as well as universities and educators in both China and the U.S.

**Introduction**

Based on the research data, analysis of the existing cross-cultural adaptation theory and literature, this study uses Chinese international students who are studying in the U.S. as the research subjects. The researcher used interviews, observations, as well as document review to discover and investigate the current status and challenges Chinese international students faced during their time studying at a U.S. university. The cross-cultural adaptation status, challenges, influencing factors, as well as suggestions of the participants were investigated and analyzed carefully.

Chinese international students have an overall positive status in studying abroad, but they still have challenges and difficulties during their study in the U.S. The main conclusions of this study are as follows:

In the academic aspect, most of the Chinese international students can handle the academic content and have satisfactory outcomes, but they usually have low interaction and participation with both professors and classmates during class and have insufficient team working skills with American peers; moreover, Chinese international students still prefer to rely on the Chinese language and their Chinese classmates when they face academic difficulties instead of communicating with professors. The researcher also finds that Chinese international
students lack independent research skills, academic writing skills, and the awareness of academic honesty.

In the linguistic aspect, many Chinese international students have difficulties in communication skills and writing skills. Although they have been learning English for many years before they come to the U.S., they still experience the obstacles and barriers caused by a lack of English language proficiency. Moreover, their English proficiency test scores sometimes can’t truly reflect their real English language proficiency.

In the cultural aspect, Chinese international students have a very strong sense of their Chinese identity. Some Chinese students are willing to learn and experience the American culture, while the majority of Chinese students prefer to create a Chinese community and isolate themselves from the outside environment. At the same time, Chinese international students’ insufficient English language proficiency and cultural differences between China and the U.S. also create barriers in cultural adaptation.

**Discussion of the Results.**

The analysis shows that Chinese international students at University A have a good overall situation in the United States. In the meantime, interviews with participants reflect the pressure of professional academic writing, English language proficiency, and cultural differences between China and the United States as major challenges for Chinese students.

In addition, the study also reflects that there are not enough supporting mechanisms for Chinese students in both China and the United States, especially the lack of linguistic and cultural support for Chinese students provided by the U.S. universities.
This study discusses the causes and solutions of the challenges based on the research data and points out that Chinese students should have better preparation in many aspects, including academic, English language, and cultural preparation before leaving for study abroad.

In addition, the relevant educational organizations and universities in both China and the United States should improve the quality of international student educational services and management efficiency.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature. According to the literature review in Chapter Two, there are many types of research and literature about Chinese international students’ adaptation in the U.S. university. The researcher found that some of the literature are relevant while others are not applicable to Chinese international students participants at University A.

Academics aspect. Wang (2013) believed that because the academic study tasks are too tight, Chinese international students put a lot of time into learning and neglect social and cultural activities. However, during the research study, the researcher found that the academic pressure was not the key barrier of Chinese international students’ social adaptation. The reason why Chinese international students prefer to isolate themselves in a micro Chinese environment is mainly caused by the cultural differences between China and the U.S. as well as Chinese international students’ English proficiency.

At the same time, the surroundings of Chinese international students such as their parents and peers put a lot of attention on the level of academic success. As long as they can overcome the difficulties in learning and achieve good academic performance, they are considered as well
adapted to the new environment by themselves and their families. The results of this research also proved that many Chinese parents only care about their children’s academic performance, and parents don’t have the awareness to encourage their children to communicate with American professors and classmates.

Fan (2003) also pointed out that due to the influence of Confucianism on the teaching philosophy of education in China, teachers in China have absolute dominant positions, while students are expected to remember the teaching content and follow teachers’ guidance. The researcher also found that most of the Chinese international students are passive learners, which means they don’t like to communicate with professors and American classmates. When they encounter academic difficulties, they prefer to solve the problems with other Chinese students.

Meanwhile, Chinese international students lack independent research skills and they heavily rely on clear instruction provided by professors. Many Chinese students often feel a great deal of anxiety when they need to plan their own academic path and even their own future professional career path in U.S. universities (Yan, 2011). The results from this research were similar to Yan’s opinion. Many faculty members mentioned that many Chinese international students had difficulties in individual research and making decisions for themselves.

Moreover, Fan (2003) also believed that college-level students in the U.S. are expected to organize their own academic plans independently and establish their own career prospects during their study in higher education. However, most Chinese students typically rely on external guidance from teachers and parents. The results from the research confirmed Fan’s perspectives; many faculty members reported that they believed Chinese international students need step by step instructions and lack independent study skills.
Zimmerman (1996) pointed out that the success of international students depends to a large extent on their relationship with their mentors. However, due to different learning habits, limited English proficiency, and intercultural communication problems, unsuccessful interaction between American instructors and Chinese international students can create additional pressure for Chinese international students. The researcher found that Chinese international students didn’t want contact with their professors, and many faculty members also reflected that they were willing and eager to help Chinese students, but Chinese students preferred to avoid communication with professors and even provided fake information about their study status to their professors.

**Academic support.** Zhang (2013) argued that academic support is beneficial to both the university and the students, and the academic support should help students according to their own characteristics and needs in order to help their cognitive development. Students should be encouraged to use a variety of services and resources to determine the needs of students to ensure their academic success.

Zhang (2013) also claimed that students often feel confused and helpless and lack self-confidence in their learning processes. In addition, many students are also struggling under everyday living and psychological stress. During the adaptation to a new campus, the pressure of new surroundings is more prominent, which may reduce the enthusiasm of students to take the initiative to learn. For these reasons, providing academic support to students not only can boost students’ academic success in higher education, but also support their psychological well-being and mental health.
At the same time, Chinese students study participants didn’t show that they need academic support on their major studies, but many Chinese students mentioned that they could be benefited from academic writing training and presentation training.

Moreover, faculty members at the university also pointed out that they were willing to provide extra academic support to Chinese international students, and they were hoping that Chinese international students could be more positive and come to communicate with their professors.

**Linguistic aspect.** Just like Yan (2011) mentioned in his research, English proficiency becomes one of the first major barriers for many Chinese students during their study in the U.S. Due to the exam-oriented educational system in China and the lack of necessary contextual knowledge and cultural background, there is not enough opportunity for Chinese international students to practice English before coming to the U.S.

Meanwhile, the mainstream English language training in Chinese schools is mainly focused on paper-based standardized tests, which highly values grammar, writing, and reading skills but pays very few attention to listening and speaking skills. The gap between the English proficiency test score and the Chinese students’ actual English proficiency can also cause challenges and barriers in daily studying and living. Many participants agreed with Yan’s theory and they pointed out that English language training in China was focused on exam-taking skills instead of English proficiency. When Chinese students arrived in the U.S., their English proficiency was insufficient for both academic learning and daily life.
The provision of a proficiency test score such as the TOEFL or the IELTS is a part of the application process for Chinese students before coming to study in the U.S. However, the goal of English proficiency test training is mainly to help Chinese students meet the language requirement in the application, instead of truly improve students’ English language proficiency (Yan, 2011).

Although some students have high test scores, their English proficiency is still insufficient for studying in U.S. universities. In addition, due to lacking language training, many Chinese students feel it is difficult to understand both academic professional language and social communication content in the U.S. (Yan, 2011). Lyu (2017) also pointed out that due to the limitations of language proficiency---although many Chinese students have already passed the required English proficiency tests,--they still often find it difficult to engage at a high level when discussing academic topics with professors and peers. Both Chinese international students and faculty members confirmed that the English proficiency test score can not truly reflect the students’ English language proficiency. In many cases, although the students had high English proficiency test scores, their English skills were insufficient in both academic learning and daily communication.

Moreover, many Chinese students do not understand and realize the gap between their English test scores and their actual English proficiency. They refuse to participate in the English language program because they believe that their test scores already meet the university’s English requirement for international students, and many of them also think it’s a waste of time and money to attend additional English training courses in the U.S.
Linguistic support. Pathirage, Morrow, Walpitage, and Skolits (2014) point out that non-native English-speaking international students encounter diverse challenges due to language barriers while studying in the United States of America. Universities are committed to assist international students to overcome these challenges by offering a variety of support services including ESL courses. Most of these ESL courses are academically oriented, and the ESL courses are very helpful in improving students’ academic language skills and social language skills.

Almost every Chinese student participant pointed out that the English language training in China was inefficient and unhelpful, however, the feedback collected from Chinese international students about the English language training program in the U.S. were highly variable based on the individual. Some students believe they benefited from the English training program while others think the English training program is a waste of time and money.

Moreover, Chinese student participants also mentioned that the English language training program in the U.S. can’t improve their English proficiency because the teaching content is disconnected from students’ academic study and daily life.

As the result, the universities in the U.S. should update their English language training materials, and also create different types of English support to Chinese international students such as provide English writing workshops and presentation preparation activities.
**Cultural aspect.** When Chinese students come to study in an American university, the Chinese culture familiar to them no longer exists, which can cause frustration and anxiety. At the same time, many Chinese students have difficulties understanding social norms in communicating with others, and they also often feel confused by uncertainty in their identity and self-awareness (Yan, 2011).

Kalervo Oberg argued that culture shock was an unavoidable experience of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad (1960). Oberg (1960) distinguished four stages of culture shock: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment.

However, Wang (2013) pointed out that due to the limited time length of study abroad, it’s very difficult for Chinese international students to fully adapt to American society and culture. Meanwhile, according to the data collection, the main barrier of Chinese international students’ adaptation is the awareness and motivation instead of the limited time length of study abroad.

Yang and Clum (1994) argued that the cultural differences between China and the U.S. are significant, and it is often difficult for Chinese students to adapt to the mainstream culture of the United States. However, many Chinese students strongly prefer to isolate themselves by creating a Chinese cultural community; they only get access to English during class, and the rest of their daily life is totally Chinese style: they live with Chinese classmates, hang out with Chinese friends, and speak Chinese languages. In this situation, no matter how many years they stay in the U.S., those Chinese international students can still maintain their ways of living and will not experience cultural differences.
The results from this research showed that the barriers during cultural adaptation were basically motivation and English proficiency. First, most of the Chinese students at University A didn’t want to communicate with American friends and American society, but preferred to create a Chinese community and isolate themselves from the outside world. Insufficient English language proficiency also had a negative impact on Chinese students’ cultural adaptation. Many student participants reflected that they weren’t willing to talk with Americans because they feel embarrassed and uncomfortable speaking English.

Cultural support. Chavajay (2013) argued that the bond and connection with family members and friends were very helpful and supportive for international students’ cultural adjustments. The results from this research showed that most of the Chinese international students at University A were in the U.S. by themselves without the company of family members. At the same time, University A recruited American students as International Peer Associates League members (IPALs) in order to help incoming international students adjust to college life at the University A. However, many Chinese international students thought that their Ipals were not truly helping them because some IPALs even disappeared without notice or were unwilling to help Chinese students.

As the result, Chinese international students suggested University A recruit American students who like Chinese culture to become IPALs and provide more support to help Chinese students organize their own cultural events. Moreover, many Chinese international students also suggested University A make connections with other local institutes and Chinese communities in order to create more opportunities for Chinese international students to participate in social life in the U.S.
The implication of the Results for Practice. This qualitative case study successfully discovered and analyzed the current status and challenges Chinese students faced during their time studying in a U.S. university through both perspectives and behaviors of current Chinese international students, as well as perspectives and experiences of faculty members and administrators.

During the study, Chinese international students provided many useful and thoughtful suggestions for University A. At the same time, faculty members and administrators at University A also pointed out their expectations and suggestions for both current and future Chinese international students in order to help them succeed in academic, linguistic, and social aspects during study abroad in the U.S.

As the result, the researcher created and summarized suggestions for universities and educators in both China and the U.S., as well as both current and prospective Chinese international students to effectively prepare and support Chinese international students in relation to the status and challenges Chinese students faced during their study in the U.S.

Suggestions for universities and educators in China. Universities and educators in China should provide opportunities and resources for Chinese students to be prepared before they go to study abroad. Universities and educators in China need to have better understanding about their students and pay additional attention to students who have the willingness to study abroad and provide to the students help and support.

Be aware of students’ needs. Chinese educators often view their students who want to study abroad as independent groups, and pay less attention to or even overlook future study abroad students because the students are leaving the country. However, the lack of support and
preparation from universities and educators in China can have a significant negative impact on Chinese international students’ acculturation at American universities. Universities and educators in China should be aware of future study abroad students’ needs and provide extra support such as American customs, spoken English, and independence training.

**Academics preparation.** Universities and educators in China should provide better academic preparation for future study abroad students, especially for those Chinese universities who have an educational partnership with overseas universities. In daily teaching, teachers should assign more teamwork, presentation, and independent research tasks for students to improve their academic skills. Teachers also need to build academic ethics awareness with students by being clear and direct regarding ethical expectations in assignments and tests.

**Language preparation.** Due to the exam-oriented English education in China and the gap between students’ test scores and their actual English proficiency, universities and educators in China should realize the importance and urgency of providing linguistic support to future study abroad students.

Universities and educators in China also can imply Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) during daily English teaching in order to provide quality teaching to students and help them to improve their English language proficiency. The SIOP model is a research-based and validated instructional model that has proven effective in addressing the academic needs of English learners throughout the United States (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018). Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2016) pointed out that the SIOP model is a framework for comprehensive academic interventions for students’ increased academic language proficiency.
According to the SIOP model, the English teachers in China should carefully design their lesson plans in order to include academic content and English language objectives in all lessons, connect students’ background experiences with the teaching and learning process, and deliver the lesson with appropriate speech and variety of techniques within classroom instruction in order to support students’ learning (Echevarria, Vogt, & Shor, 2016).

During daily practice, English language teachers in China should also add more practical opportunities for giving presentations or participating in class discussion. Teachers also can play English news or videos during the self-learning hours. For those universities who hire foreign English instructors, universities should add more teaching hours for English communication practice, and the universities can invite foreign English instructors to engage with students more than teaching hours, such as hold some cultural events to celebrate American holidays, English workshops, as well as movie parties.

Culture preparation. Before sending students to study abroad, universities and educators in China should provide cultural preparation for students. Chinese universities should add more American cultural workshops or have selective American culture classes. The cultural separation can also be delivered and combined with daily teachings, such as independent research topics on American historical events or American traditional holidays.

Daily life preparation. Because most college students in China live in the dorms with their classmates and eat at the dining halls, they have almost nothing to worry about in their daily life. However, when students leave China and study in the U.S., they need to take care of themselves. In order to help students prepare before they leave China, universities, and educators in China should encourage students to develop their individual living skills during their extra
curricula time, such as making meals or driving. The more preparation students have before they go to study abroad, the less anxiety they have during their adaptation.

*Parents and families education.* It is essential and important to educate students’ parents and other family members about the situation their children are going to face in the U.S. However, most families can only receive information from their children, and sometimes families have no idea what status or challenges students face during their study abroad if their children chose to lie to them. On the one hand, parents and other family members can not help students to be well prepared because they don’t know what skills students need in the U.S. On the other hand, because of lack of information, parents and other family members also can not supervise their children’s performance and behaviors in the U.S. As the result, universities and educators in China should provide introduction and education to parents and families, and encourage parents and families to work with universities and educators together to help students get ready before they go to study abroad, as well as supervise and guide students during their learning progress.

*Suggestions for universities and educators in the U.S.* As the hosts of international students and the leaders of global education, universities and educators in the U.S. should provide support, opportunities, and resources for Chinese international students to adapt into American classrooms and improve their English proficiency during their time studying abroad in the U.S. Universities and educators in the U.S. need to have better understandings about Chinese international students and pay additional attention to students who have to face challenges in academic, linguistic, or cultural aspects and provide help and support.
Establish higher enrollment requirements. The enrollment requirements are very important to educational institutes in the U.S. because the enrollment requirements can decide the academic quality and English proficiency of future students and help the U.S. universities to gain general predictive knowledge about the future students. In recent years, the enrollment population of Chinese international students has been increased, however the quality of new students has become more and more difficult to predict and control. The universities in the U.S. should increase both their academic performance requirements and English language proficiency requirements in order to attract high performing students from China.

Screen and guide students. Educators in American universities need to screen Chinese international students and guide them based on their own status and situations. Educators should work closely with Chinese international students and learn about their goals and challenges. Afterward educators should arrange specific support to Chinese students based on their unique needs and challenges. For instance, for those who want to adapt to the American campus and have sufficient English skills, educators should provide more opportunities to be included in campus events; for those students who want to adapt into American campus but have linguistic barriers, educators should provide English training programs; for those students who have a strong willingness to go to graduate schools, educators should arrange graduate school application workshops.

Provide academic support. Professors and administrators in American universities should pay close attention to Chinese students’ academic performance. Most of the Chinese students prefer to live and study within their own Chinese community, and they help each other with academic content and assignments by using Chinese languages and materials. As a result,
Chinese students’ assignment or test scores may not be able to reflect their real academic performance. As educators, professors in the U.S. universities need to be sensitive and aware of the academic challenges for Chinese students and provide necessary support.

Reach out to students. As we discussed before, Chinese students prefer to solve problems within the Chinese students' community, and many of them won’t contact their professors unless they have no other choices. Under this situation, educators in the U.S. universities are expected to be more initiative and reach out to Chinese students more often, which can not only improve the teaching and learning efficiency but also can improve the relationship between educators and students.

Provide English language support. The universities and educators in the U.S. should realize the Chinese students’ daily challenges and difficulties created by English language proficiency. The universities and educators in the U.S. should extend the English language training program for Chinese international students and also provide specific training to Chinese students--such as academic writing courses and presentation training courses-- as well as English language workshops.

Provide cultural support. The universities and educators in the U.S. should create a welcoming learning environment for Chinese international students by providing cultural support. American universities need to provide both American and Chinese cultural support to Chinese international students. On the one hand, universities should provide American cultural knowledge to Chinese students such as a Thanksgiving party which can help Chinese students to become familiar with the American lifestyle and help adaptation to American life. On the other hand, universities should provide Chinese cultural support such as Chinese traditional festival
celebrations to create a warm environment for Chinese students but also educate American educators and students to learn about other cultures and enhance the diversity on campus.

    **Connect with the local community.** The universities and educators in the U.S. should reach out to other institutes or organizations in the local area to make connections and create activities together for Chinese international students, such as the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) and other local organizations.

    **Hire student workers to help.** Many universities in the U.S. have Asian culture clubs or American students who are learning Chinese language. The universities and educators should recruit student workers from those groups and pair them with Chinese international students. At the same time, universities can also encourage Educational major students to become conversational partners or tutors for Chinese international students. U.S. educators and universities can also connect Chinese students with local companies or schools in order to create volunteer opportunities for Chinese international students to use their advantage as bilingual speakers.

    **Professional development and diversity awareness education.** The universities and educators in the U.S. should pay extra attention to the development of diversity and a safe environment for everyone. Universities in the U.S. should provide diversity awareness education to both students and faculty/administrators, in order to eliminate the discrimination and stereotypes between China and the U.S including the stereotypes of Chinese students and the stereotypes Chinese students have of American students.

    **Daily life support.** Many Chinese international students live off campus and don’t receive much daily life support from the university. -campus housing is too expensive and students have
to move out during holidays. However, Chinese students don’t want to attend campus activities because they live off campus and most of them don’t have vehicles. As the result, the universities in the U.S. should provide affordable and reliable housing plans for international students. This can not only improve the diversity on campus but also can help break the isolation of the Chinese community and have a positive impact on Chinese students’ adaptation in the U.S. Moreover, U.S. universities that have bought properties close to the campus might consider creating an “international living community” with both American students and international students to create opportunities for both American students and international students to promote language and culture exchange by living close to each other. At the same time, creating the “international living community” could similarly reduce the cost of renting or staying in the dorms and

**Suggestions for Chinese international students.** As a minority foreign group in American universities, the success of Chinese students is closely related to their academic performance, language proficiency, and cultural adaptation. In order to be better adapt to the new life of study abroad, Chinese students should prepare themselves both before and after study abroad.

**Be prepared in China.** Before leaving home and go to study abroad, many Chinese students don’t have the awareness to prepare themselves for the future challenges, especially for those students who already received the offer from the universities in the U.S.. Students should use their time wisely to develop academic, linguistic, and social skills. Future Chinese international students are expected to have solid academic knowledge, proficient English skills, and the ability to take care of themselves in the new environment. Many students believe that
they will learn what they need after arriving in the U.S., however the more comprehensive the preparation, the easier it is to adapt to the new study abroad life.

*Build independent learning and living skills.* Chinese international students should build independent skills in both academic learning and daily life. In academic learning, Chinese international students should improve their research skills and problem-solving skills. In daily life, Chinese international students should learn how to take care of themselves, including cook, clean, and drive.

*Know your goals.* When Chinese students arrive in the U.S. and begin their academic journey, they should set reasonable goals for themselves, such as academic performance or career development. At the same time, Chinese international students should always remind themselves that they are full-time students, and study should always be their first priority, instead of online games or shopping.

*Have a positive study attitude.* Chinese international students need to develop a positive learning attitude. Although the learning styles are different between China and the U.S., students are always required to have a positive learning attitude. Having a positive learning attitude is especially important for Chinese international students because they need to adapt to the new teaching and learning system under a new linguistic environment.

*Communicate with professors and classmates.* Chinese international students should take the initiative to interact and communicate with professors and American classmates much more often. Although Chinese students can solve many difficulties within their Chinese community, it is very important for Chinese international students to reach out to professors or American
classmates, which can not only improve Chinese students’ English proficiency but also help Chinese students to be involved in teaching activities.

*Build academic ethics awareness.* Chinese students need to improve their academic ethics awareness, due to the different cultural background and the different academic requirements between China and the U.S.. Many Chinese international students don’t have enough awareness of academic ethics, and the different research citation format between China and the U.S. can cause academic ethics problems. As a result, Chinese international students should learn the requirement of academic ethics of American universities and also be honest about the assignments and tests.

*Step out of the Chinese community.* Many Chinese international students in the U.S. prefer to create and maintain a Chinese community, and they don’t want to step out their comfort zone to interact with Americans. However, staying in the Chinese community can block the linguistic and cultural environment of the U.S., which can cause a negative impact on Chinese students’ English proficiency improvement and cultural adaptation. The researcher encourages Chinese international students to step out of the Chinese community and experience the outside society, in order to improve their English proficiency and cultural adaptation.

*Dare to provide honest feedback.* Students’ voices are key components and useful resources for universities and educators to understand the current status and needs of students. However, many universities and educators in the U.S. don’t know how to support Chinese international students because they don’t have enough feedback or suggestions from Chinese students. Chinese international students are more inclined to suffer and keep silent when they are oppressed or treated unfairly. The researcher encourages Chinese international students to be
brave and be willing to share their opinions, feedbacks, and suggestions with universities and educators in the U.S., in order to guide universities and educators to provide better support for Chinese international students.

**Limitations.** Generally speaking, the results of this study achieved the intended purpose of investigating Chinese international students’ acculturation at an American university. This research has attempted to make Chinese international students’ current status and situation understood, and provide suggestions for the future. However, there are still some limitations that need to be modified and improved.

First, this study is a case study based on University A. Due to the limited number of participant samples, it cannot represent larger groups of Chinese international students in other educational institutions.

Second, as mentioned before, University A has one strong academic partnership with JS University in China, and the undergraduate Actuarial science and Math major students from JS University make up the majority of Chinese international students. As the result, this research has the limitation in selection and diversity of participants.

Third, because the student participants are mostly Actuarial Science and Math major undergraduate students, they cannot fully represent the Chinese international students’ acculturation of other academic levels or other academic majors.

Fourth, due to the limited time length of this research, this research cannot fully reflect the status and challenges of Chinese international students’ acculturation throughout their entire academic program in the U.S.

**Recommendations for Further Research.**
There are a number of gaps and limitations in our knowledge about the Chinese international students’ current status and challenges in the U.S. The researcher has four recommendations for future research:

First, the future research should improve the participant selection and the diversity of the target group, such as enlarge the participant population, recruit participants from more institutes, and cover more academic levels and majors.

Second, future research can use the combination of qualitative, quantitative, and even mixed research methods, to improve on data triangulation and data analysis.

Third, the researcher recommends the future research have a longer time span for observation and data collection, in order to discover the entire adaptation progress of Chinese international students during their study abroad in the U.S.

Fourth, the researcher expects the future research can involve students’ parents in the research and try to enhance the support system for both current and prospective Chinese international students.

Conclusion.

In this study the researcher discovered and analyzed the current status and challenges Chinese students face during their time studying at a U.S. university, using both perspectives and behaviors of current Chinese international students, and experiences of faculty and administrators at an American university. The researcher also collected many useful suggestions for both Chinese students and the universities and educators in the U.S.
According to the data collection and analysis, Chinese international students have challenges and difficulties in academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects during their study in the U.S., which are caused by the different learning habits, linguistic proficiency, and cultural background between China and the U.S.

The researcher provided many suggestions for universities and educators from both China and the U.S. to provide information and knowledge to support Chinese international students before and after they go to study abroad in the U.S.

Meanwhile, findings from this research study are also beneficial for both Chinese international students in the United States and Chinese students who are preparing to go to the U.S. to study abroad.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for students

Conversation opener questions
1. Can you tell me your name please? 你能告诉我你的名字吗？
2. How long have you been studying at University A? 你在University A学习了多长时间？
3. What was your favorite part and your least favorite part of studying at University A? 在University A学习期间，您最喜欢的部分和最不喜欢的部分是什么？
4. Please let me know if you have any additional information that you’d like to provide or share with me about this topic. 如果您有任何其他信息需要提供或与我分享，请告诉我。

Academic aspect questions
1. What is your major at University A? 你在University A的专业是什么？
2. Do you think your current academic progress at University A is difficult or easy? Why? 你认为现今在University A的专业学习是困难还是容易？为什么？
3. What are the hardest parts of learning at University A? 你认为在University A学习期间最困难的是哪些部分？
4. Can you remember any topics or courses that were especially interesting or challenging for you? 你能想起任何格外有趣或格外挑战的话题或课程吗？
5. What do you do when you facing academic challenges? 你在面临学业压力的时候是如何应对的？
6. Do you maintain a regular meeting schedule with your professors/advisers? Why? 你与你的教授有规律地会面吗？为什么？

Linguistic aspect questions 语言方面
1. Did you participate in English training before came to University A? If so, what kind of training? 你在来到University A前参与过英语培训吗？是怎样的培训？
2. Have you been in the language training program at University A? If so, how long? What is your perspective of the program? 你在University A参与过语言培训课程吗？你对这个课程的看法如何？
3. Which aspects of English do you think is challenging to you? Why? (Listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar...) 你认为哪些语言方面最具有挑战性？听力，口语，阅读，写作，语法？
4. What did the university do to help you overcome the linguistic barrier? Both University A and your university in China. 大学是如何帮助你克服语言障碍的？包括University A和你在中国的大学。
5. Please let me know if you have any feedback and suggestions you’d like to provide or share with me about this topic. 如果您有任何其他信息需要提供或与我分享，请告诉我。

Cultural aspect questions 文化方面
1. Have you experienced cultural differences? What kind of cultural differences are they? 你经历过文化差异吗？你所经历的是什么样的文化差异？
2. What do you usually do to deal with cultural differences? 你如何应对所面临的文化差异？
4. Please let me know if you have any feedback and suggestions you’d like to provide or share with me about this topic. 如果您有任何其他信息需要提供或与我分享，请告诉我。

University support and suggestions 大学支持与建议
1. Do you know any activities that the university has to help Chinese students? Have you participated in related activities? Why? 你了解大学哪些支持中国留学生的活动？你参与过此类活动吗？为什么？
2. How do you hope universities can strengthen academic, linguistic, and cultural support for Chinese students? 你是如何希望大学在学术，语言，和文化方面支持中国留学生的？
3. How do you hope universities can strengthen support for your post-graduate life or career? 你如何希望大学对中国留学生进行毕业后支持？
4. Please let me know if you have any feedback and suggestions you’d like to provide or share with me about this topic. 如果您有任何其他信息需要提供或与我分享，请告诉我。

Interview Questions for faculty/administrator

1. Can you tell me your name, please?
2. What are your daily (teaching/administrative) responsibilities in working with Chinese international students?
3. How long have you been working with Chinese international students?
4. What are some of the supports that are provided to Chinese international students during their time studying at Arcadia? Are there any that you think are particularly beneficial? Why? Any that you think should be added? Why?
5. What is your perspective of Chinese international students at University A? (in Academic, linguistic, and cultural aspects)
6. Can you remember any topics or courses or types of experiences that were especially challenging or stressful for these students?
7. Which aspects of academic work do you think is challenging to these students? Why? (academic major, English proficiency?)
8. What are some specific factors that you believe affect their learning, in both positive and challenging ways? Why?
9. What are some intercultural factors that you think affect their academic and social activities?
10. What do you do when your Chinese students face academic/linguistic/cultural challenges?
11. Over time have you seen any changes in students’ needs or strengths?
12. Are there supports that you feel you might benefit from, in your work with these students?
13. How do you hope universities can strengthen academic, linguistic, and cultural support for Chinese students?
14. From your perspective, how could universities best support Chinese international students to be successful (academically, socially, culturally), either before they study in the US, or during their international college experiences?
15. What additional information or insight would you like to share with me about this topic?

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